



CENTER FOR
TECH AND
CIVIC LIFE



YEARS OF CTCL

Annual Report **2025**

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Co-founders Tiana Epps-Johnson, Donny Bridges, and Whitney May celebrate CTCL's 10-year anniversary at the 2025 Debrief.

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Letter from Our CEO

I'm so proud and grateful to name out loud that in 2025, CTCL turned 10 years old. That's right: we marked a full decade of steady, methodical work to make our elections excellent and help our democracy thrive — and it's paying off! Big wins for the year included a dramatic increase in election security funding in Congress's 2026 proposed budget, the result of years of relationship building with local election officials willing to rise up, advocate for their needs, and grow into storytellers who can capture the attention of lawmakers. We celebrated the impact our comprehensive civic information datasets have left on the voting landscape as we prepare to pivot and diversify our research efforts. We finalized our 26 voluntary, nonpartisan Standards for Election Excellence, a body of work unlike any seen before in the field. And we've doubled the size of our board by welcoming three additional members to help navigate the next phase of this crucial work.



When I think about where CTCL's journey began, the journey means even more — we started on a shoestring at best. In February of 2015, co-founder Whitney May and I, newly arrived in Chicago from D.C. with all our worldly goods in one van, shared an apartment in Bucktown with CTCL's third founder, Donny Bridges. Half of a whiteboard in the living room was scribbled over with CTCL's fledgling operations, healthcare plans, and year one goals for supporting our democracy. On the other half lived our shopping lists and dishwashing schedule. To brighten the place up, I even persuaded Donny — notoriously allergic to cats — to welcome a kitten named Kevin with the promise of a year's supply of allergy medicine (he was quite chagrined to learn this meant one very large, reasonably-priced bottle from Costco).

Back then, we were three millennials with a dream of better elections. But that shoebox apartment, just a few months later, was where we landed our first multiyear grant and the first moment we thought: *maybe we can actually do this*. And we did.

The story of 2025 is one of tending the seeds planted over a decade, of acting continually with bravery and care, and championing joy and resilience as we do it.

Other milestones came: the first-ever asynchronous professional development video courses for election officials. Partnerships with tech giants to create groundbreaking voter lookup tools. The first trainings for election officials on how to build websites (at that time, I still had to persuade many skeptics that voters *actually used Google* to look up voting information). This incredible team grew and matured, responding to the acute challenges of each election cycle: cybersecurity (2016), misleading and false information (2018), and the fallout of a global pandemic that has reshaped our democracy to this day.

The only constant in life is change, but some things remain the same in America.

A decade later, the underfunding of our elections remains an unresolved crisis for our democracy. There is still no sign of federal, nationwide standards for excellence in election administration. And while voters now have many more resources to look up voting information, research gaps into what makes our democracy work — and how to support the people who run it — endure. All of this rededicates us, in every way possible, to supporting local election officials in making sure that they're prepared for what the future brings.

The story of 2025 is one of tending the seeds planted over a decade, of acting continually with bravery and care, and championing joy and resilience as we do it.

When CTCL began, we couldn't imagine the challenges and victories waiting in the coming decade, or the amazing possibilities on the horizon as we finally celebrated our tenth anniversary. We can't wait to walk you through the past year in the pages that follow.

(In pet news, Kevin is still around and has since been joined by a second cat, Georgie, and dogs Rose and Joanne. Kevin still has no idea what election administration is — but at least Donny has his own place now).

With gratitude,

Tiana Epps-Johnson

CEO, Center for Tech and Civic Life

The Last Ten Years

Partnered with [Facebook](#) and [Google](#) to connect millions of voters with civic information ahead of Election Day

Launched the [Election Toolkit](#), co-created with election officials from rural, suburban, and major metropolitan election jurisdictions across the country

CTCL co-hosted second-annual [Ballot Data Convening](#) at Google's headquarters in D.C., **leading to the nationwide adoption of Open Civic Data Identifiers (OC-DIDs)**, unique codes that make it easier for organizations and agencies to connect and share civic data

CTCL teamed up with the Center for Democracy and Technology to deliver our first **cybersecurity training series**, attended by more than 300 election officials who served nearly 50 million voters across the U.S.

Launched our [cybersecurity trainings](#) online in a **self-paced format**, pivoting away from live Zoom trainings in order to expand CTCL's reach and deepen engagement with election officials across the country



At the end of CTCL's [first five years](#), we had connected election officials serving over **80 million voters** with tools and trainings while providing the public with information about candidates and elected officials nearly **300 million times**

2015



CTCL founded in Chicago, IL by Tiana Epps-Johnson, Whitney May, and Donny Bridges

Launched first [online training](#) to support rural election offices with [election website development](#)

2016



2017

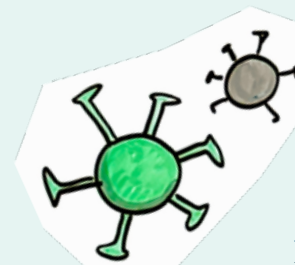
Our 2017 data release from the [Reflective Democracy](#) dataset was featured in the [Washington Post](#) and [Cosmopolitan](#)

2018



Co-founder Tiana Epps-Johnson **gave a TED Talk** on CTCL's work to modernize elections

2019



2020

Launched the [2020 COVID-19 Response Grant Program](#) to ensure that local election administrators everywhere had the staffing, training, and equipment necessary to safely serve every voter on Election Day



2025

All **26 voluntary, nonpartisan Standards for Election Excellence** are completed and released for public comment

The Alliance Pathfinder Cohort—a diverse group of 50 election departments representing nearly 12 million voters — began piloting the [Alliance Certification Program](#)



The Election Infrastructure Initiative successfully pushed Congress to secure \$55 million in elections funding for FY 2025

2024

Launched the [Rural and Nonmetro Election Infrastructure Grant Program](#), granting over \$3.7M in elections infrastructure funding to 358 rural and nonmetro election departments across the country

Announced the Language Access Project grant program to connect more than two million Spanish-speaking voters with nonpartisan civic information in 2024



2023

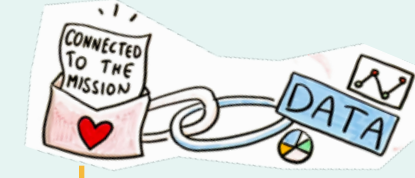
15 election departments named to the Alliance's inaugural cohort of [Centers for Election Excellence](#)

Through the Election Infrastructure Initiative, successfully urged Congress to include **\$75 million in federal funding for local election departments** in the 2024 FY budget

CTCL had trained state and local election officials serving more than **half of the country's voters**

2022

Announced the **launch of the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence** at co-founder Tiana Epps-Johnson's second TED talk at [TED2022](#) in Vancouver, B.C.



2021

Published our [impact report](#) on the 2020 COVID-19 Response Grant Program and outlined the case for predictable government funding for election infrastructure

Introduced our new coalition, the [Election Infrastructure Initiative](#) (EII), to advocate for \$20 billion in federal funding for critical election infrastructure over 10 years



Defining Excellent Election Administration — Everywhere

Since CTCL's inception, we've connected local election officials with the training, resources, tools, and conversations with experts that they need to excel. Over and over, we've heard the need for election offices to be better able to vouch for their own excellence and others' — giving rise to an audacious proposal to fill the gap left by a lack of federal, nationwide guidelines for election administration. In 2025, we came several steps closer to fulfilling that goal.



An audacious project

Last year, we worked with dozens of election departments to help define what running excellent elections looks like, including connecting them with expert advice and publicly available resources to better serve their voters. **But to better understand this work, we need to head back to 2020.**

Across the board, election officials overcame significant funding and capacity gaps to deliver safe and secure elections in 2020. That trial by fire helped accelerate a reimagining of what U.S. election administration could be not just during election cycles, but in between them: anchored in an enduring means of upskilling the field, of giving election departments tools to vouch for themselves and each other, and of getting on the same page about what excellent elections look like in every zip code. To this end, in early 2022 CTCL launched the **U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence** as a nonpartisan collaborative working to help local election departments improve operations, develop a set of shared standards and values, and obtain access to best-in-class resources to run successful elections.

The Alliance also provided the foundation for a multiyear effort to create a sustainable, scalable model of support for local election departments — grounded in shared **values**, the development of 26 voluntary, nonpartisan **Standards for Excellence** in election administration, and an **Alliance Certification Program** that recognizes election departments for achieving and sustaining those Standards.

In all, nearly **300 election officials** representing **190 jurisdictions** serving over **36 million eligible voters** weighed in during the development of the voluntary, nonpartisan Standards for Election Excellence

The Debrief 2025

In February 2025 the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence gathered over 100 election officials and other election experts in Chicago to distill key lessons learned from the 2024 election cycle, celebrate collective progress in the election administration field, and map where we go next when it comes to critical issues like election security, public trust in elections, election infrastructure funding, election staffing, and more. We also celebrated CTCL's 10th birthday!



February in Chicago is cold, but the camaraderie at the second annual Debrief kept us warm, as did pride at celebrating a decade of CTCL's wide-ranging and collaborative work ensuring excellent elections everywhere. It all culminated in the graduation of the Alliance's **Founding Cohort of 15 Centers for Election Excellence** and the publication of the 26 voluntary, nonpartisan Standards they helped to co-develop over the past two years of in-person and Zoom gatherings. Offices reflected on their two-year journey from the first inaugural event of the Alliance in 2023 through their graduation, attended expert panel discussions, participated in an immersive timeline exercise, and exchanged knowledge and best practices.

Partners Included:



Whitney Quesenberg Civic Icon Award



Some contributions deserve their own, unique honor — one we named after an icon we've worked with for years. **Whitney Quesenberg**, the Chief Program Officer of the Center for Civic Design, has had an immense impact on CTCL, on us as individuals, and on the field of election administration with her passion for approaching democracy as a design problem and improving the voter experience through clearer visual communication. We were delighted to present her with this inaugural award alongside **Pam Anderson**, the former executive director of the Colorado County Clerks Association, whose record of tenacious work for election reform in Colorado makes her an equally outstanding civic icon.



The Pathfinder process has been fantastic.

The questionnaire for each Standard is a self-evaluation which really helps to identify priorities for our office. And I think it's important to mention that these are OUR priorities. Every Pathfinder identifies the places where they want to improve to serve their community.

Our commitment [...] is enhanced through the monthly meetings where we hear from other jurisdictions on how they are tackling similar projects. It is inspiring."

Pathfinder Fred DeCaro III
Registrar of Voters, Greenwich, CT

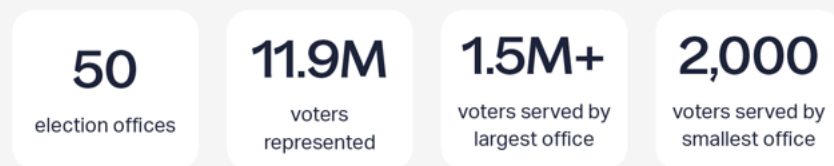


Scaling the Standards: 2025-2026

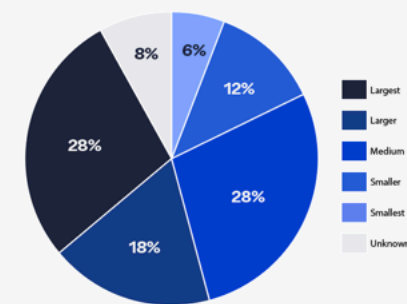
Heading out of the 2025 Debrief, we launched into the next phase of our work with the Alliance and recruited our second cohort of Centers for Election Excellence, the Pathfinders. These offices committed to meeting monthly for a year and a half beginning in June 2025 to help collectively determine what it takes to achieve the Standards and chart pathways for the field, starting with a questionnaire about where they stood individually with 1-3 chosen Standards.

With this group of **50 election offices of all sizes and geographies, serving nearly 12 million voters**, we have deepened our understanding of what resources are required to run excellent elections, how much administering them costs, and how achieving excellence impacts voters. Together they're sharing successes, setbacks, and lessons, and preparing storybooks of their journeys to inspire the field. And they'll be first in line to pursue official recognition through the Alliance Certification Program.

Meet the Pathfinders

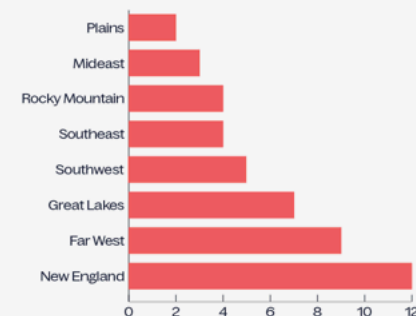


Pathfinders by Jurisdiction Size



Jurisdiction size categories are drawn from [Stewards of Democracy](#).

Pathfinders by Geographic Region



Regions are defined by the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Socializing the Standards and reinforcing best practices

With all 26 of the Standards now published and a certification program launch imminent, CTCL staff spent 2025 sharing and presenting on the Standards to hundreds of local election officials both in-person and virtually at 24 conferences in 16 states. These included piloting our new board game, [ElectionQuest](#), as an interactive, collaborative way to inform local election officials about the Standards and the certification program. We also reinforced best practices through our first-ever two-day virtual workshop in August 2025 on **Creating Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Election Offices**, which garnered a record attendance of 261 local election officials.



What's next?

Unlike existing certifications in the space, the Alliance Certification Program certifies **entire election departments, not just individuals**. This helps to ensure election office resiliency, even when staff turnover happens, and recognizes that democracy is a team sport. Through this program, interested departments nationwide will be able to submit their progress toward the Standards by answering questions about how their office currently meets a given Standard and demonstrating their work in action.

Given that Standards must be achievable by any office of any size or resource level, **every election department in the U.S. will be eligible**

to pursue certification, with self-study opportunities available for offices looking to improve their performance, and a public designation for progress and achievement of the Standards. We continue to be committed to equipping election departments with the resources and expertise necessary to pursue any available Standard of their choosing and enjoy the recognition, increased public trust, and operation improvements that are part and parcel of standardized election excellence.

The Alliance Certification Program is set to launch in April 2026.

Victory From the Ground Up

In 2025, CTCL and our partners in the Election Infrastructure Initiative supported and connected local election administrators as they mobilized at greater scale and with a broader platform than before, making their cases for federal funding both in writing and in person to Congress. These relationships and activations laid the groundwork for a major 2026 victory, validating the collective power of local officials to move the needle on federal funding for election excellence and the importance of a sustained organizing model.



A federal budget breakthrough

The story of 2025 begins with its result: the victory that opened 2026. The FY26 appropriations bill passed in February 2026 includes **\$45 million for HAVA (Help America Vote Act) election security grants**. This is huge — the direct result of the efforts of election official advocacy and all of our partners in the Election Infrastructure Initiative. This victory represents years of work by and in collaboration with local election officials who have written and spoken up for their communities' vital needs, even traveling all the way to Washington to do so.

While many departments and programs funded by the federal government have seen massive cuts, CTCL and our partners have supported election officials with the tools and training to make their voices heard. From connecting at conferences to facilitating the submission of hundreds of appropriations request forms and letters of support, this work has ensured that **local needs continue to have a seat at the national table**. In sheer numbers, this appropriation marks:

▶ A **\$30 million increase** overall from the FY25 budget*

A **\$20 million increase** over previous commitments from the Senate

A **\$30 million increase** over previous commitments from the House

Tangible impact for more than **8,000 local offices** across the country

**In FY24 & FY25 combined, Congress appropriated just \$70M for election security, a sharp decline from the approximately \$400 million provided annually during the first Trump Administration. The Project for Election Infrastructure (PEI) has projected that fully funding national election infrastructure needs would cost approximately \$400 million per year, which was outlined in PEI's recent federal funding request letter on behalf of election administrators across the country.*

Engaging local election officials in 2025

This breakthrough didn't happen in a vacuum. Here are just a few of the accomplishments from the last year that laid the groundwork:

In 2025, local election officials...

Connected with us at **83** conferences in **41** states and Washington, D.C. at state, regional, and national associations

Submitted **250** Programmatic Appropriations Request forms to Congress (the crucial first step in getting HAVA funding included in the federal budget)

Placed **150** signatures on a letter of support for election security infrastructure funding

Attended **124** meetings with members of Congress during EII coalition partner the Project for Election Infrastructure's Advocacy Day in September 2025

Participated in **10** EII Monthly Action Hours, including a first-of-its-kind storytelling training for election officials working toward telling compelling stories to legislators to make the case for robust, fully-funded election infrastructure



Direct action in Washington: Advocacy Day, September 2025

One of 2025's highlights was Advocacy Day in D.C. on September 30th, 2025, presented by EII coalition partner The Project for Election Infrastructure (PEI). Just hours prior to the shut-down, **a bipartisan group of 81 officials from jurisdictions large and small attended 124 meetings with members of Congress and staff** — a nearly 300% increase over the last in-person advocacy day hosted by EII in January 2024. The reception was overwhelmingly positive (100% of attendees said they would attend again and recruit colleagues to join in future) and put a human face to EII's call for federal funding to ensure secure and resilient elections in 2026.

It was powerful to be here in Washington alongside officials from every corner of the country.

Rural counties face unique challenges, from limited staff to aging equipment, but we share the same responsibility as larger jurisdictions to deliver secure elections. Together, we're sending a clear message that federal support is essential to keep elections strong in all of our communities."

Tonya Wichman
Director of the Defiance County Board of Elections, Ohio



Building resilience on the ground

We also assisted in creating multiple assets to educate the public about local election officials' needs, especially through the lens of vulnerability and risk. Our October 2025 report, [Fostering Resilient Elections: Opportunities for Stronger Election Administration and Emergency Management Collaboration](#), co-authored with our partners at The Elections Group (TEG) and the Partnership for Large Election Jurisdictions (PLEJ), focused on relationship building and best practices between emergency managers and election officials while preparing for a range of unforeseen circumstances.

On the technology side, in response to the eradication of the elections program at CISA (Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency), we supported the development of a [cybersecurity services one pager](#)— distributed at several national conferences and at EII's September Monthly Action Hour — **as well as vital cybersecurity trainings for over 1,000 County IT Managers in fall of 2025.**

What's next?

Our EII coalition partners at PEI are continuing to work on authorizing legislation to create a permanent recurring allocation of federal election security funding, **which if enacted would unlock an additional \$200-400 million.** They are working to leverage this appropriation season to make a strong case for more expansive bipartisan action from Congress.

Regardless of what happens in Congress going forward, our work remains the same: we will not stop advocating for the public funding necessary to stabilize elections across the country and ensure a thriving democracy for years to come, and we will continue to **connect local election officials with the programming, partnerships and opportunities to ensure excellent elections at all resource levels,** especially as we publicly launch the Alliance Certification Program.



The Changing Face of Research

For ten years, CTCL's research efforts have focused on voter-facing work, with the goal of empowering Americans to become and remain civically engaged. This work has both paid off and brought us to a crossroads, allowing us to shift attention to the next wave of research priorities and actionable insights that elevate the voices and needs of local election officials and today's voters.



A look back: Passing the baton on civic information

In February 2015, CTCL was founded with two flagship research projects on its desk: [The Governance Project](#), a standardized dataset of federal, state, and local elected officials nationwide, and [The Ballot Information Project](#) (BIP), an aggregated and standardized dataset of candidate and referenda information for major elections. From the beginning, our data also supported other datasets and findings: The [Reflective Democracy dataset](#), funded by the Women Donors Network and built on top of Governance Project data, was first featured in the [New York Times](#) in 2015.

From 2015 onward, our research efforts focused on civic information — whether planning annual Ballot Data Convenings (conferences of researchers and organizations working to make nonpartisan ballot data more accessible to voters), developing voting time estimation tools, or expanding our datasets to include hyperlocal races at the city and school board level. By 2023, voters had accessed these high-quality civic datasets **more than 250 million times** through partnerships with the biggest tech companies and nonpartisan civic engagement organizations. CTCL also created and published the first and only nationwide dataset of ballot information [available in both English and Spanish](#).

But times change — and since we got into the game, others have stepped up to the plate. Our datasets have made possible dramatic improvements to federal, state, and local election websites and helped expand voters' pathways to accessing trusted information. We're immensely proud to have supported other organizations like BallotReady and Ballotpedia as they've grown in the voter engagement space. In 2025, we left the voter-facing space, knowing it was in good hands and better than we found it.

Having revolutionized access to civic information for hundreds of millions of voters and empowered other organizations with our demographic data, it's time to shift our focus to work that will drive real change for election officials and the voters they serve, and for us to concentrate on asking our own questions, generating our own insights, and contributing to new narratives.

Reflecting on a decade of the Ballot Information Project

BIP's history is a snapshot of a major transition in the availability of ballot data, from a haphazard landscape full of information gaps to a radical improvement in the volume and quality of data now supplied directly by local election authorities through government websites.

In 2016, only about 57% of counties had a website that published any kind of ballot data, leaving swaths of voters without government resources for basic information about candidates and elections. With BIP, CTCL led the charge on creating vast, comprehensive datasets about who was running for office — gathering and standardizing information via phone, email, and even fax, reviewing sample ballots received by post, and even transcribing candidate lists dictated over the phone! Our information also enabled partners like Google, Pew, Vote.org, Engage, and Microsoft to create new lookup tools for this information.

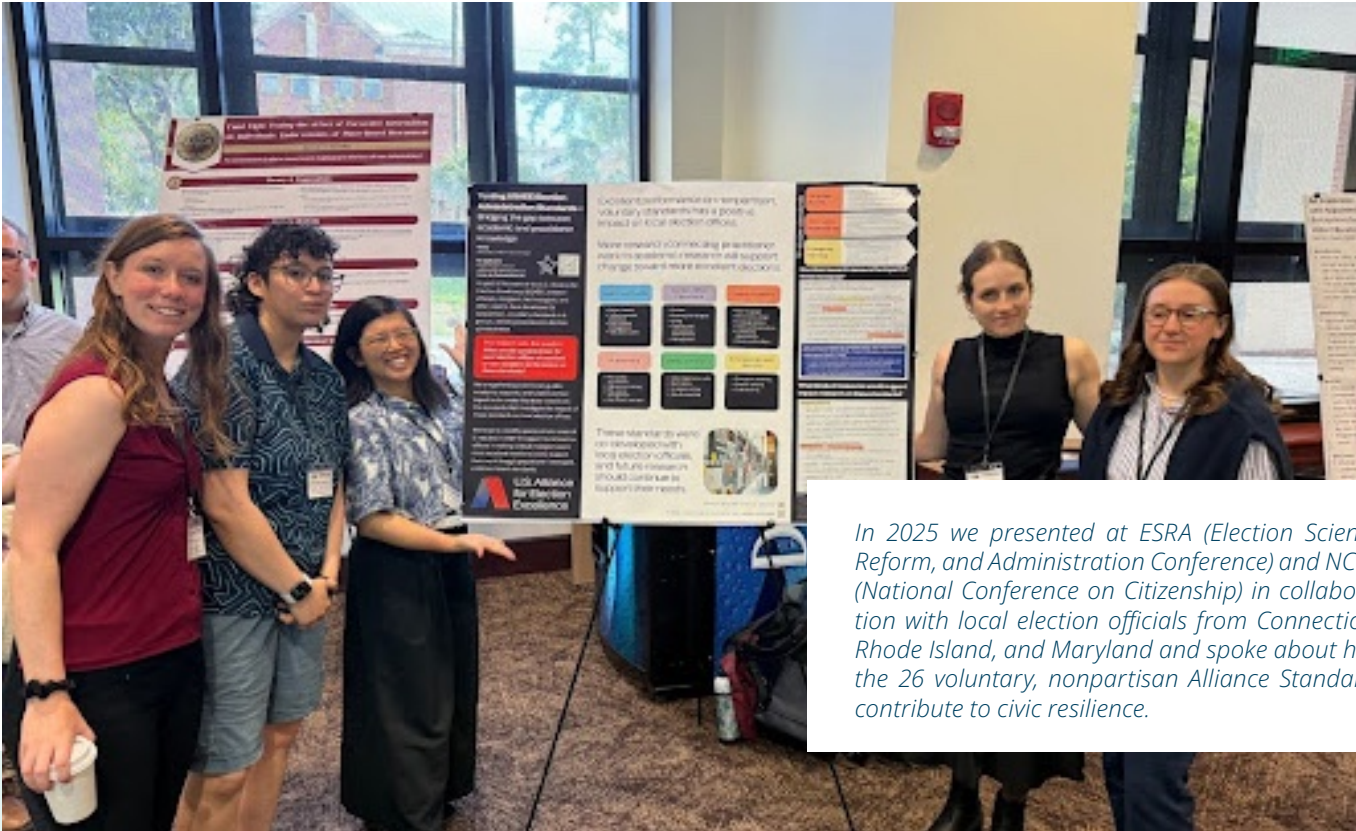
Over a decade of work, public appetite and legislative investment in civic information

has skyrocketed. Social media and widespread adaptation to new tools and technology have made voters more engaged and curious. The impetus for making this data freely available is now coming from the top, not just from the county and local level up — Iowa now requires county auditors to have .gov sites, Kansas mandates the publication of election information on government sites, and Secretaries of State across the board are now asking for improved training and third party resources.

A widespread improvement in ballot data availability through government sources **benefits voters in the long run** by positioning local election officials as authoritative sources and by providing a sustainable, reliable well of information that cannot disappear or retreat behind a paywall the way it can on for-profit sites. We're beyond proud of BIP's ultimate role in making ballot data more available to voters nationwide.

By 2024, **90%** of counties had ballot data collectible from a state or local election authority

By 2024, **93%** of county election offices had a website (those that did not served about 100 unique counties and 1.5 million eligible voters)



In 2025 we presented at ESRA (Election Science, Reform, and Administration Conference) and NCOC (National Conference on Citizenship) in collaboration with local election officials from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maryland and spoke about how the 26 voluntary, nonpartisan Alliance Standards contribute to civic resilience.

What's next?

While BIP has reached its sunset, **The Governance Project**, our best-in-class dataset of nearly 9,000 elected officeholders at the federal, statewide, and legislative levels (and nearly 34,000 down the ballot), will remain active, having received a major refresh at the end of 2025. Our demographic data will also remain a vital tool for generating actionable insights on the elections landscape, and we will retain it in order to drive research about who is in office.

A new collaborative research effort with our partners, the Institute of Responsive Government, will also utilize our datasets to better understand barriers to public service for state legislators by establishing baseline understanding of the number of state legislators who resign

before their term is up. The **State Legislature Modernization Project** will analyze data for over 600 legislators serving between 2021 and 2025 to identify who is leaving office early — and lay the groundwork for preventing further attrition. Additional topics of interest down the road include exploring economic, familial and other demographic factors that affect election officials' longevity in the job.

Our research capacities are also expanding to support the **U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence**. We are conducting a literature review on the academic foundations for the voluntary, nonpartisan Standards for Excellence, as well as research into additional field-advancing Standards with fewer case studies and empirical



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