



Unprecedented Coalition to Shed Light on Voting Systems *A New Open Process Aims to Produce Test Specs for “Consumer Reports” Style Performance Ratings*

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MARINA DEL REY, CA – Feb. 1, 2005 – Leading stakeholders in voting systems—including state and county election officials, computer and security experts, large and small voting equipment makers, and advocates and social scientists—have come together to develop objective ways of evaluating voting systems. This first combined effort marks a call to arms directed at restoring voter confidence and impacting the legislated mandate for new Federal standards.

[Voting Systems Performance Rating](#) (VSPR), rather than evaluating voting systems itself, will produce specifications for objective and repeatable tests that can readily be applied by independent labs or even vendors. Separate tests are envisioned for security, privacy, transparency, accessibility, usability, accuracy, and reliability. These performance-based tests will be available for use in purchasing decisions, thereby unleashing innovation and merit-based competition.

VSPR, an unincorporated entity composed of volunteer subject-matter experts and stakeholders, is modeled after the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the unincorporated volunteer entity that develops the standards that make the Internet work. VSPR will operate transparently and reach decisions using democratic processes. General membership in VSPR is free and open to anyone (though some parts of the organization only accept qualified members), and the group’s deliberation will be through email and archives that are publicly available on the Web. The VSPR governance structure has been crafted to give equal authority to each of its four stakeholder groups.

VSPR will be supported by the [Voting Systems Institute](#) (VSI), which is itself a joint entity of the [Digital Government Research Center](#) (DGRC) and the [Center for Governmental Studies](#) (CGS).

VSI, a new entity, has agreed to provide support and outreach for VSPR, much as CNRI (Corporation for National Research Initiatives) serves as secretariat to and otherwise supports IETF. VSI will have no voting role within VSPR and will have no authority over VSPR decisions. Its support will be focused on communications and organizational infrastructure, including organizing VSPR conferences. Its outreach will include working with election officials, advocacy groups and policymakers, including the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the new federal oversight agency created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, which is charged with developing standards for voting systems.

DGRC, founded in 1998, is a joint research center of the [Information Sciences Institute at the University of Southern California](#) and [Columbia University's Department of Computer Science](#) and is the largest single recipient of National Science Foundation (NSF) funding for digital government research projects. DGRC's projects focus on technical digital government issues in collaboration with policy and social science researchers. It also plays a leadership role for NSF in building the national—and now international—digital government community, drawing representatives from academia, the private sector and government.

CGS, founded in 1983, creates innovative political and media solutions to help individuals participate more effectively in their communities and governments. CGS is an experienced, respected leader in political reform and community development focused on increasing civic participation through innovative use of new technology. Current CGS efforts include [Video Voter](#), a national project to allow candidates and ballot measure committees to communicate directly with voters, [ConnectLA](#), an online resource for low-income individuals and communities of color, and a series of new approaches to traditional campaign finance and political reform problems.

The VSPR charter, the founding members, membership and email list sign-up, and other information regarding VSPR can be found at www.vspr.org. Below are quotes from just a few of the founding members of VSPR followed by some related to VSI:

Warren Slocum (San Mateo County, California, Election Director)

“Election administration is operating at some very different levels of technical sophistication in this country, and frankly, what is needed is a way to suitably inform purchasing decisions. My hope is that VSPR will succeed in developing objective ratings along various dimensions that will prove truly useful in informing those decisions.”

Alfie Charles (Sequoia Voting Systems)

“To date, the examination of voting systems by election officials has been composed of a pass or fail grade from federal and state certification bodies and intense county-by-county reviews. This new approach will rely on national experts to develop detailed functional tests that will provide a full range of scores to help officials make informed decisions about which voting system best suits a county or state's specific needs.”

Avi Rubin (Johns Hopkins University)

“VSPR is a proposal for a truly open process involving all of the players, including vendors and e-voting critics, to establish security metrics for evaluating voting systems. While the undertaking is ambitious, it has the potential to be an invaluable tool for informing a critical function of our democracy.”

David Jefferson (California Secretary of State's Technical Oversight Committee)

“It is vital that we move away from the simple binary model of evaluation, in which voting systems are merely deemed acceptable or unacceptable according to outdated standards. We need to move to a more quantitative model that allows voting systems to be rated or measured on various scales, enabling them to be objectively compared to one another as well as to fixed standards.”

James McCarthy (National Federation of the Blind)

“We are pleased to participate in this important effort and look forward to sharing some of our experience, which comes from our in-house testing of election equipment for use by the blind and visually impaired.”

Ted Selker (Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project)

“This organization could be very effective at bringing together a broad range of positions and organizations in a useful way to improve voting technology and process.”

Lillie Coney (EPIC—Electronic Privacy Information Center)

“EPIC recognizes the importance of transparency with regard to technology that is intended for use in public elections. The need for ballot secrecy and voter privacy is the underpinning of our nation's democracy. EPIC applauds the goals set forth by the VSPR effort and encourage more resources to be focused on openness in the evaluation and adoption of e-voting technology for use in public elections.”

David Chaum (Votegrity)

“VSPR is our best hope for really solving the voting system problem in this country, by getting agreement on metrics and thereby enabling competition. After having helped spearhead the formation of VSPR, I’m now looking forward to focusing on some innovations of my own and taking a back seat role in VSPR as a new vendor.”

Yigal Arens (DGRC)

“We are embracing VSI as a natural outgrowth of our community building role in digital government. ISI understands how to help build consensus from our work with IETF. We’re part of the Viterbi School of Engineering, and as such we’re familiar with the technical issues involved. Given USC’s depth in policy studies, political science, engineering, communications and law we have an understanding of the broader implications of VSI’s work as well.”

Tracey Westen (CGS)

“VSI presents a breakthrough in restoring public confidence in electronic voting. With a reputable system in place for evaluating the reliability, security and accuracy of systems, along with outreach and education to policymakers, community leaders and concerned citizens, voter confidence can be restored. VSI is a natural extension of CGS efforts to improve democracy through research, advocacy, information technology and education. We are pleased to be a founding partner in the Voting Systems Institute.”

Jim Dolbear (VSI)

“A lot has happened since HAVA passed. State and local election officials initiated a wide range of reforms and vendors introduced new voting equipment. But the progress has been tempered by continuing security concerns. And now coming out of the November elections, throughput rates, absentee voting, provisional voting, and registration have been highlighted as potential issues. VSPR offers a way forward by bringing together all parties to structure and define the relevant technical aspects of voting systems. VSI is looking forward to supporting VSPR in its technical work and we’re dedicated to providing the best educational tools to support the widest possible outreach.”