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State and local officials today are confronted with increasingly complex voting system technology and an increased risk of voting system failure. Responding to calls for assistance from the states, the United States Congress authorized the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to develop voluntary national voting systems standards for computer-based systems. The resulting FEC Voting System Standards (“the Standards”) seek to aid state and local election officials in ensuring that new voting systems are designed to function accurately and reliably, thus ensuring the system’s integrity. States are free to adopt the Standards in whole or in part. States may also choose to enact stricter performance requirements for systems used in their jurisdictions.

The Standards specify minimum functional requirements, performance characteristics, documentation requirements, and test evaluation criteria.

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The Standards

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The Standards

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1.2 Development History for Initial Standards

Much of the groundwork for the Standards' development was laid by a national study conducted in 1975 by the National Bureau of Standards, now known as the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). This study was requested by the FEC's Office of Election Administrator's predecessor, the Office of Federal Elections of the General Accounting Office. The report, "Effective Use of Computing Technology in Vote-Tallying," made a number of recommendations bearing directly on the Standards project. After analyzing computer-related election problems encountered in the past, the report concluded that one of the basic causes for these difficulties was the lack of appropriate technical skill at the state and local level for developing or implementing sophisticated and complex standards against which voting system hardware and software could be tested.

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The FEC held a series of public hearings in developing the initial Standards. State and local election officials, election system vendors, technical consultants, and others reviewed drafts of the proposed criteria. The FEC considered their many comments and made appropriate revisions. Before final issuance, the FEC publicly announced the availability of the latest draft of the Standards in the Federal Register and requested that all interested parties submit final comments. The FEC meticulously reviewed all responses to the notice and incorporated corrections and suitable suggestions. Ultimately, the final product was the result of considerable deliberation, close consultation with election officials, and careful consideration of comments from all interested parties. In January 1990, the FEC issued the performance standards and testing procedures for punchcard, marksense, and direct recording electronic (DRE) voting systems. The Standards did not cover paper ballot and mechanical lever systems because paper ballots are sufficiently self-explanatory not to require technical standards and mechanical lever

systems are no longer manufactured or sold in the United States. The FEC also did not incorporate requirements for mainframe computer hardware because it was reasonable to assume that sufficient engineering and performance criteria already governed the operation of mainframe computers. However, vote tally software installed on mainframes is covered by the Standards.

1.3 Update of the Standards

Today, over two-thirds of the States have adopted the Standards in whole or in part. As a result, the voting systems marketed today are dramatically improved. Election officials are better assured that the voting systems they procure will work accurately and reliably. Voting system failures are declining and now primarily involve pre-Standard equipment, untested equipment configurations, or the mismanagement of tested equipment. Overall, systems integrity and the election processes have improved markedly.

However, advances in voting technology, legislative changes, and the proliferation of electronic voting systems make an update of the Standards necessary. The industry has been marked by widespread integration of personal computer technology and non-mainframe servers into DRE voting systems.

In addition, voting systems need to be responsive to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and guidelines developed to assist in implementing the ADA.

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DRE standards, in order to ensure that an accessible machine does not unintentionally abrogate the mandates of the Standards.

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Innovations that use a fluid understanding of system types can greatly improve the voting

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industry, but only if controls are in place to monitor and control integrity through the proper evaluation of the system brought for qualification.

As such, vendors that submit a system

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authority recognized by the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED)

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NASED issues a Qualification Number

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qualification

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appropriate ITA

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ITA's

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NASED qualification.

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ITA

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determine

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qualification

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qualified

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not approved by an ITA are

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qualification

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qualification

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Page 11: [43] Deleted VVSG includes	Ibrahim Moiz	7/5/05 3:19 PM
Page 11: [43] Deleted Finally, the VVSG provides guidance in the form of best practices to voting officials. These best practices are not mandated and are not subject to testing by testing authorities to qualify voting systems. They are provided as adjuncts to the technical requirements for voting systems in order to ensure the integrity of the voting process and to assist States in properly setting up, deploying, and operating voting systems.	Ibrahim Moiz	7/5/05 3:19 PM
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Independent Testing Authority (ITA) and EAC accredited testing authority. Under HAVA, ITAs have been replaced by EAC accredited testing authorities. In these guidelines, EAC accredited testing authority and ITA shall be considered equivalent. In addition, the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) activities specified in these guidelines shall be performed by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC).

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The repository maintained at NIST is called the National Software Reference Library (NSRL).

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Guidance and best practices for voting officials are indicated by the notation “Best Practices for Voting Officials” preceding the best practice statement.

1.7.2.2 Relationship among entities

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with

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Voluntary Voting Systems

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specified in the VVSG

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(TDP). In order to

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qualification

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ITA/testing authority.

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ITA/

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authority

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ITA/

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that is derived from the VVSG best practice guidelines for voting

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VVSG. Additionally, the ITA/

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authority

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Note that in the VVSG, these requirements and the relationship between the ITA/EAC accredited test authority and the certification authority is with NASED, not the EAC. The EAC is assuming the responsibility for certification of voting systems from NASED. The VVSG provides guidance denoted as “Best Practices for Voting Officials.” This guidance may be used to allow jurisdictions to incorporate appropriate procedures to help ensure that their voting systems are reliable, accessible, usable, and secure. Furthermore, this guidance may be used in training and incorporated into written procedures for properly conducting the election and operating voting systems.

Figure

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provides an illustration of these relationships.

Figure 1 Relationship between entities

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requirements

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VSS-

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VSS-2002

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sections,

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(i.e., New Material, date, etc.) at the bottom of pages with new material

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contained (i.e.,

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) within other requirements.

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children

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requirement

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designations

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mandatory

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qualification

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to indicate

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to be followed (implemented)

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to indicate

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to indicate

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Normative

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Some sections in the VSSG have narrative text prefixed by the keywords: Discussion or Best Practices for Voting Officials. This text is informative and has no bearing on conformance.

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VSSG categorizes

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Specifically, if a category is not applicable to a voting system, then the requirements in that category are not applicable.

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systems and thus are ignored by paper-based systems.

the broadest audience, including voting system developers, equipment manufacturers and suppliers, independent test authorities, local agencies that purchase and deploy voting systems, state organizations that certify a system prior to procurement by a local jurisdiction, and public interest organizations that have an interest in voting systems and voting systems standards.

- Section 2 describes the functional capabilities required of voting systems.
- Sections 3 through 6 describe specific performance standards for election system hardware, software, telecommunications and security, respectively.
- Sections 7 and 8 describe practices for quality assurance and configuration management, respectively, to be used by vendors, and required information about vendor practices that will be reviewed in concert with system qualification and certification test processes and system purchase decisions.
- Section 9 provides an overview of the test and measurement process used by test authorities for qualification and re-qualification of voting systems.
- Appendix A provides a glossary of important terms used in Volume I.
- Appendix B lists the publications that were used for guidance in the preparation of the Standards. These publications contain information that is useful in interpreting and complying with the requirements of the Standards.
- Appendix C addresses issues of usability of voting systems, commonly referred to as “human factors.” This appendix does not represent mandates that voting systems will be tested against, but rather contain recommendations and best practices on usability issues designed to provide vendors and election officials with guidance on designing and procuring systems that are easy and intuitive to use by voters.

Volume II, Voting System Qualification Testing Standards describes the standards for the technical information submitted by the vendor to support testing; the development of test plans by the ITA for initial system testing and testing of system modifications; the conduct of system qualification tests by the ITA; and the test reports generated by the ITA. This volume complements the content of Volume I and is intended primarily for use by ITAs, state organizations that certify a system, and vendors.