Voting machines: Near-term procurements; mobile election future

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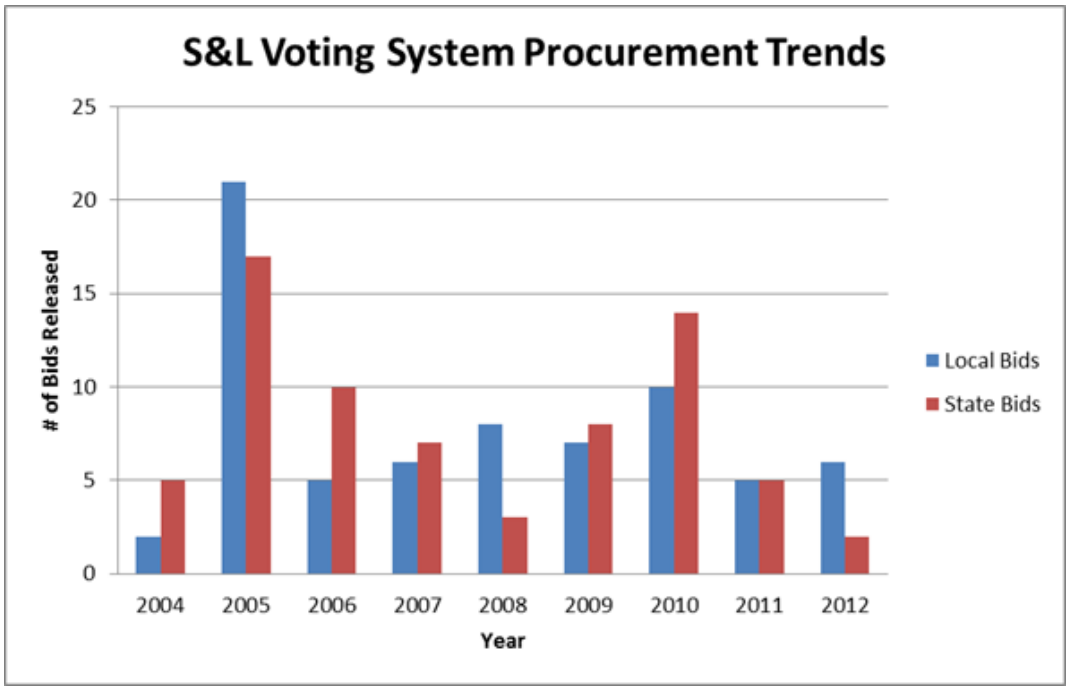
After the 2000 U.S. presidential election debacle, when confusion swirled around Florida's butterfly ballots, and almost 2 million votes were disqualified for reasons such as "hanging chads," the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was signed into law in 2002. HAVA required all states and localities to update their election processes, including replacing manual-lever voting machines and paper-based voter rosters with computerized versions.

HAVA also established the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission (EAC), which is an independent bipartisan body that oversees states' adherence to HAVA mandates, and administers federal grant funding to assist states in acquiring and maintaining electronic and optical-scan voting systems. HAVA did not include standardized requirements for states to follow; instead, it was vague enough to allow states to revise their own election processes and draft new implementation plans. The EAC, on the other hand, was tasked with establishing voluntary voting system guidelines (VVSG), a voting system certification program, and accredited test laboratories to ensure basic functionality, accessibility and security are met by all electronic and optical-scan voting systems acquired by state and local governments.

In FY 2003, $899 million in federal HAVA grant funding was set aside for U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia to begin transforming their election processes and procuring voting systems. Five additional rounds of grant funding have been awarded to states since then: FY 2004 ($1.48 billion); FY 2008 ($115 million); FY 2009 ($100 million); FY 2010 ($70 million); FY 2011 ($1.29 million).



Due to the injection of federal funding and looming implementation deadlines, 2005 saw a spike in procurement for voting technology products and services. A smaller increase occurred in 2010, the year before federal funding was expected to drop off. In anticipation state and local governments' procurement of voting systems picked up before federal funding dried up. The average grant award during those first two years ranged from $15 million to $25 million, with Texas ($57 million in FY 03 and $74 million FY 04) and California ($94 million in FY 03 and $169 million in FY 04) receiving the most funding. To date, $3.25 billion has been awarded to grantees, 63.1 percent of which has been spent on upgrading voting systems, and 13.6 percent on implementing voter registration systems.

Less than 35 percent of all votes cast in 2000 used an electronic or optical-scan voting machine. That number increased to nearly 65 percent in 2004, and reached 89 percent in 2008. With a market like this you can imagine HAVA mostly benefited major voting technology vendors, such as Hart InterCivic, Inc; Dominion Voting Systems (formerly Diebold Election Systems); and Election Systems & Software (ESS).

In 2012, you would think the story of voting technology opportunities is nearing its happy end. Think again. This story has merely turned to the next chapter, for the following reasons: First, federal HAVA funding has taken a nose dive and may never get back to FY 2004, or even FY 2009 levels. Second, those now 8-year-old voting machines, like all computers, will soon need to be upgraded or replaced. This will force cash-strapped states to pony up money they don't have to replenish battered voting machines. Lastly, the next generation of mobile and Web-based voting systems has yet to enter the market.

All this in mind, over the next three years, states will attempt to ready themselves for the 2014 and 2016 election cycles by looking for affordable options that keep them HAVA-compliant in the short term. Many states and localities that purchased their voting machines outright in 2004 and 2005 may opt to lease this time around. Many more will look for maintenance

and repair services to extend the life of ailing equipment to maximize their return as they wait for next-generation technology.

In the long term, mobile and Web-based voting systems are expected to replace everything. Though the technology may exist to vote in this November's election from the comfort of your home or the convenience of your smartphone, there is no way to guarantee the high level of security needed to use these voting methods for a U.S. presidential election. Even though some states are experimenting with online voting by allowing military and overseas voters to submit their ballot via the Web, the technology for secure online and mobile voting is still another 10-12 years away.

In anticipation of these technological advancements, the EAC along with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have created a committee to proactively rewrite the federal guidelines for the next generation of voting systems.

To learn more about this and other state and local procurement trends and opportunities, be sure to check out Deltek's **GovWin IQ** product and follow the State & Local General Government Team on Twitter at **@GovWin_GenGov**.

Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). **http://www.eac.gov/**