



National
Policing
Institute



Public Safety & Elections

A Guide for Law Enforcement

This report was written and designed in partnership between the National Policing Institute, States United Democracy Center, and 21st Century Policing Solutions.

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This document is part of a series entitled *Public Safety and Elections: A Guide for Law Enforcement*. The full report can be found [here](#).

Section 2: Interagency Collaboration and Mutual Aid

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Like other large-scale events, election season may require agencies to respond to requests for or request supplemental law enforcement capacity from outside their jurisdictions. Whether it's a political candidate's visit, Election Day, or a key moment for certifying the election, a number of election season events may require agencies to respond to or make requests for additional resources. Many law enforcement agencies are accustomed to relying on their neighboring jurisdictions for extra officers or resources in emergencies and may already have plans memorializing these arrangements. But the lead-up to election season is a good opportunity to revisit and update mutual aid agreements, ensuring they are current, complete, and consistent with law, policy, and local practice. It is also a good time to review policies and standard procedures for both requesting and receiving requests for mutual aid.

Here are some additional field-tested recommendations for preparing for mutual aid during election season:

Identify resource gaps prior to election season.

As election season approaches, consider which election-related circumstances would exceed the agency's existing capacity. Consider also what other major events, such as a sporting event, convention, or concert, will occur during election season that will further draw upon the agency's resources. Ensure the requisite relationships with neighboring law enforcement and other local and state agencies have been developed in advance. Make sure response plans will fill any anticipated gaps.

Draft and update mutual aid agreements to reflect the jurisdiction's needs and anticipated incoming requests.

The approach of election season is a great time to ensure that:

- All mutual aid agreements are up to date with existing agency policies and applicable law;
- All agreements regarding support during emergencies are reflected in written mutual aid agreements, and that election events are specifically accounted for; and
- The mutual aid agreements comprise all potential requests for assistance and that all parties share a common understanding of terms and expectations.

These documents, in conjunction with training, are opportunities to ensure that any agency providing aid to another is clear about the chain of command and knows exactly what they can and cannot do in that jurisdiction, particularly when addressing demonstrations or unrest.

Jurisdictions have run into trouble when agencies providing mutual aid engage in practices that are prohibited in the host jurisdiction, potentially leading to escalation in the moment and liability afterward. Local officers—those who know the area, local rules, and the community—should be on the front line of any major actions and at the helm of key decision-making. Law enforcement leadership can help provide clarity about acceptable responses by making their mutual aid agreements as clear as possible as to what practices are permitted. The rules of engagement should ensure that the practices of the jurisdiction where officers are operating are respected while also ensuring that incoming officers do not violate their own rules.

“It’s important to look at every partner agency’s policies and procedures since our policies are not always in sync with one another. Our agencies need to be on the same page about security protocols, especially when it comes to anything that could be subject to an open records request. Every single policy needs to be merged for success.”

— ASSISTANT CHIEF SHUNTA BOSTON
SUN PRAIRIE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Important issues to discuss and resolve in advance may include:

- Command, control, and reporting structures;
- Communication methods, including all radio and data communication methods;
- Respective roles of the host agency (such as protest management) and aid-providing agencies (such as traffic enforcement);
- Resources and equipment to be provided by the host agency and aid-providing agencies respectively;
- Body camera policy that the host agency and aid-providing agencies will follow;
- Permissible protest management tactics;
- Permissible uses of force, reporting of force, and circumstances under which force may be used;
- Permissible and impermissible crowd control tactics and equipment; and
- Which on-scene commanders are authorized to direct tactics and employ particular equipment.

Consider holding interdepartmental training and scenario planning.

Once the rules of engagement are established and memorialized in a written agreement, consider having the host and aid-providing agencies train together to make sure everyone has practice implementing the rules. This can take the form of drills, simulations, meetings, or informal tabletop sessions to ensure that officers know what actions will be appropriate in different circumstances. At the very least, each agency that is a party to the agreement should review the terms of engagement with their personnel, taking care to point out any key restrictions for a given jurisdiction. Further, consider hosting a combined training with other agencies in advance of election season that addresses, among other topics:

- Command and control;
- Communication;
- Approved protest management tactics;
- Crowd control;
- Permissible uses of force;
- Use of chemical agents; and
- Support infrastructure.