

Transparency, Reliability, Consistency....

# Security Questions You Need to Ask about Online Voting Services

Best advice from Don Aviv, COO of [Interfor, Inc.](#), an international investigation and security consulting firm.

Nothing is more important for an election than security and integrity. Any impropriety during an election would shed a negative light on the process and greatly diminish an organization's reputation and relationship with its members. Online elections carry the additional burden of being new and unique to many voters and organizations. They need to be more secure than paper balloting systems, which many deem flawed.

The only way to achieve proper levels of security is to plan, test and retest continuously for both internal and external security vulnerabilities. Utilizing third-party security experts to evaluate existing security procedures and systems is essential for a vendor to achieve the required level of compliance. Comprehensive physical and IT security assessments as well as ongoing assessments are essential to ensure your elections are safe and sound.

Any vendor should be eager to describe their security processes, including any certifications achieved through third-party evaluations.

## 10 Security Questions To Ask Online Voting Vendors

1. **What specifically do you do to maintain the integrity of the ballot itself?** You need to be sure that your vendor's online election process eliminates the possibility of someone changing or deleting a vote, question or candidate during the election. Online survey applications don't work well as election solutions because they often allow anyone with administrator access to login and make changes while the ballot is live.
2. **How do you protect the integrity of the voter lists?** Your vendor should have a system to encrypt and secure your voter information. Some solutions tie in securely to your database and don't require the transfer of voter data, but some elections may require that you send a list of voters to your vendor. If you have to send your voter list, ask your vendor to describe how that pathway stays secure. As your voter list is passed



throughout the vendor's organization to the proper technicians, you should ensure your vendor uses encrypted email and similar secure methods to minimize the likelihood of theft.

3. **How do you secure data and prevent the theft or sale of my association's voter list and membership data?** Make sure your vendor states in writing that they will not use your membership data for any purposes other than your online election. A quality vendor should also host your election at a high security data center and have a [TRUSTe-certified](#) privacy policy and privacy program.
4. **What kind of emergency support do you provide? Describe your system for ongoing monitoring of my election.** Ensure your vendor provides multiple support options and has 24/7 online support where you can access resource documents and log help requests. In addition, the integrity of your entire election can be called into question if the system breaks down during the voting process, even if it's in the middle of the night. Your vendor must have 24/7 system and server monitoring, plus a team of technicians available to monitor the systems around the clock to address any issues immediately.
5. **Do you offer true 128-bit encryption?** You need to find out if your vendor offers true 128-bit encryption, otherwise known as bank-level encryption. SSL technology allows for the transfer of information securely over the internet, so that your vote data cannot be stolen, intercepted or manipulated while in transit from a voter's computer to the vendor's election servers. Many vendors provide *up to* 128-bit encryption, which can sometimes be cracked. ***Demand true 128-bit.***
6. **Has your company received any independent verifications or certification from security experts?** The only way to guarantee that your election vendor delivers a high level of security and tabulation accuracy is to have it confirmed by a reputable, independent third party. The best election vendors will have multiple certifications and are also likely to have extensive experience working with large, well-known organizations and reputable accounting firms. Vendors should also undergo daily rigorous audits from companies like Scan Alert to ensure that highly effective, pro-active security standards are maintained at all times. Ongoing third-party evaluation and testing is essential to maintain the appropriate levels of security within any organization. A vendor should be willing to provide you with proof that their systems are evaluated and tested on an ongoing basis.
7. **What kind of security does your hosting facility have?** Find a vendor that hosts its voting software and data at a high security data center. These facilities must be certified as secure by independent sources and certifying authorities. The best and most reliable hosting facilities often have SAS 70 Type II certifications and high marks from industry sources like Forrester Research.



8. **What can you tell me about your internal policies regarding security?** Ask your vendor questions about their internal controls. Do they do background checks on employees? Do they have non-disclosure agreements with their partners? Your vendor should be able to tell you what kind of procedures they follow to minimize the potential for a security breach. They should also verify how these internal policies are tested and evaluated over time to ensure total compliance.
9. **What can I expect from your company regarding downtime or security intrusions?** Besides asking the question of the vendor, make sure you do due diligence to research the reputation of the company. Vendors with strong security safeguards and high quality hosting facilities with redundancy and backup power should have minimal downtime and intrusions.
10. **Can you supply me with references? What specific experience do you have with associations?** The online election company you choose should be able to provide you with several strong references of current clients. Be wary if they're reluctant to share names and numbers. In addition, some online election companies specialize in government elections or corporate shareholder voting. Choose a vendor that understands association elections and has successfully helped associations transition to online voting. You can also ask to speak with a representative from the vendor's third-party security compliance or certification team.

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