

RISE IN ABSENTEE BALLOTS DRIVES COLUMBIANA COUNTY TO AUTOMATE WITH OPEX® BALLOT OPENER & EXTRACTOR

Unprecedented times called for a tested solution

OPEX®

// THE BACKGROUND

After receiving 14K requests for absentee ballots for the April primary election, Columbiana County was concerned about voter turnout for the general election as the pandemic progressed. Ohio law dictates that a voter must request a mail-in ballot to be able to vote-by-mail. Ohio counties normally have 19-days prior to Election Day to begin counting mail-in ballots, but this was extended to 29 -days to help those counties handle the expected surge.

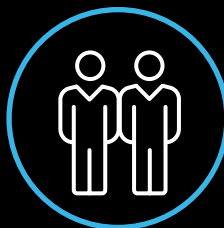
// THE CHALLENGE

Even with an additional ten days, Columbiana County knew they needed to change their process in order to count the expected number of ballots. Previously, they had never received more than 6K mail-in ballots but in the primary, they saw 14K. Each ballot has two envelopes which meant they had to manually open a total of 28k envelopes. Based on absentee ballot requests for the general election, Columbiana County was expecting a 50% increase in mail-in ballots from the primary.

// KEY CHALLENGES



BIG UPTICK IN ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUESTS SINCE COVID



LIMITED TO THREE BIPARTISAN TEAMS OF TWO PEOPLE TO OPEN, EXTRACT, AND OPEN AGAIN



THIS PURCHASE WAS NOT ANTICIPATED

// KEY RESULTS

5

NUMBER OF STAFF NEEDED TO OPEN AND EXTRACT ALL OF COLUMBIANA COUNTY'S MAIL-IN BALLOTS

44K

MAIL-IN BALLOT ENVELOPES OPENED AND EXTRACTED IN 2020 ELECTION

\$0

COST OF INVESTMENT DUE TO CARES ACT GRANT MONEY

// THE SOLUTION

After seeing a video of the OPEX Model 72™ Ballot Opener and Extractor, Columbiana County Elections Director Kim Fusco was convinced this would be the best solution to meet the County's needs. By securing CARES Act funding and investing in the OPEX Model 72™ system, the County handled a surge in mail-in ballots from 6K in 2016 to 22K in 2020 with ease. Three bipartisan teams consisting of two individuals each were able to handle the increase with no issues, and all mail-in ballots were completely processed on Election Day. The automation allowed them to handle over three times the quantity of ballots and still cut the processing time in half. By automating the ballot opening process, staff could assist in other areas to ensure all COVID safety protocols were in place.

// THE FUTURE

Columbiana County and their constituents are feeling more secure with mail-in ballots. Even as the pandemic subsides, they believe they will continue to see an uptick in absentee voting. Their investment in automation will future-proof their ability to process even more mail-in ballots as demand grows. An additional benefit is that they plan to utilize the OPEX Model 72™ system in other departments in the county when those departments experience surges in mail volumes (i.e., tax department receiving tax payments).

"WE HONESTLY DON'T KNOW WHAT WE WOULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT [THE OPEX MODEL 72]. IT SIMPLY HAS MADE OUR JOBS EXTREMELY EASIER COMPARED TO PAST ELECTION CYCLES."

-Kim Fusco

Elections Director at Columbiana County when thinking about the 2020 election

"THE OPEX BALLOT EXTRACTION EQUIPMENT ALLOWED US TO CUT OUR TIME TO PROCESS BALLOTS IN HALF EVEN THOUGH WE SAW A 3X INCREASE IN MAIL-IN BALLOTS."

-Kim Fusco

Elections Director at Columbiana County



HAVE QUESTIONS? CONTACT US. // opex.com // info@opex.com

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