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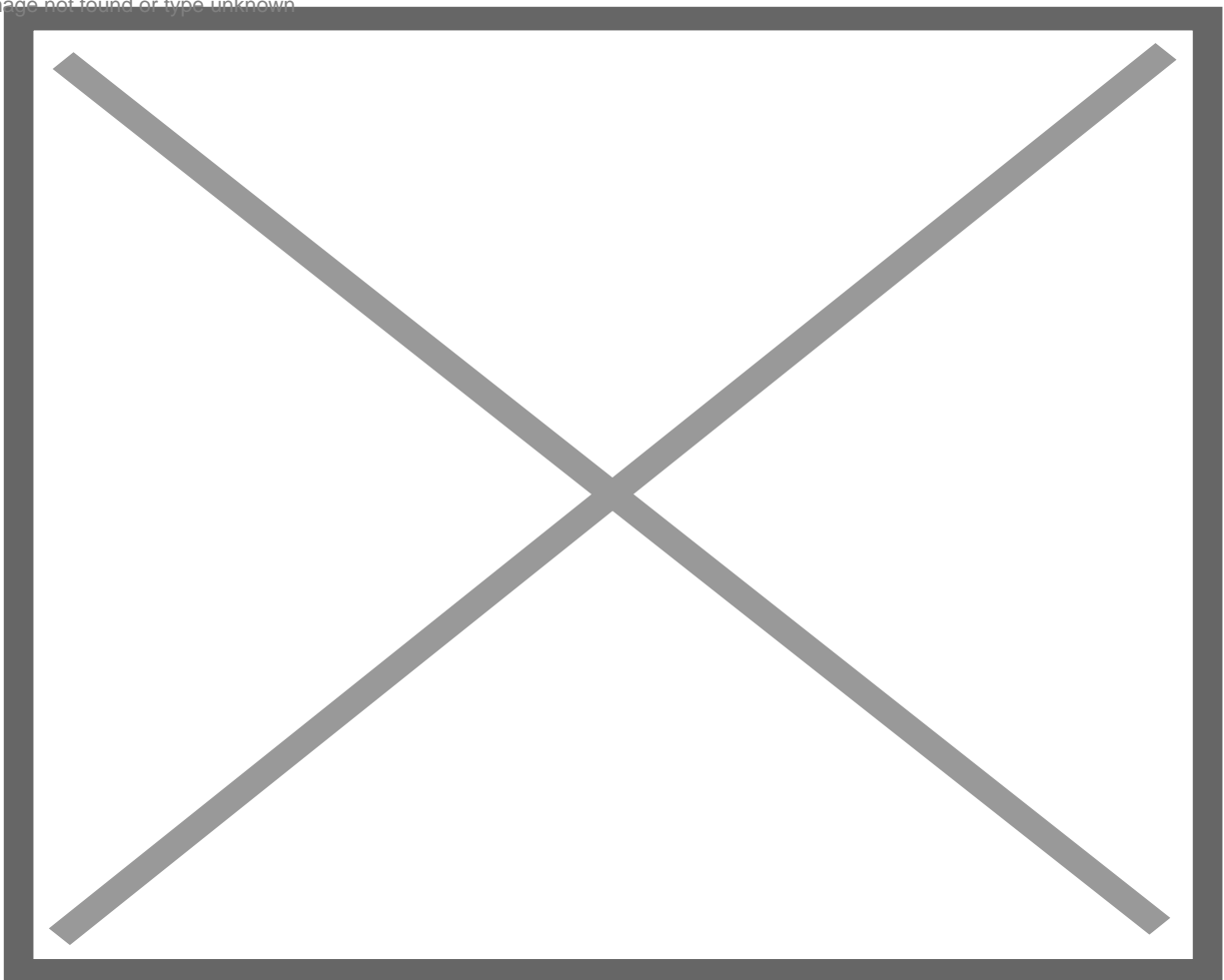
Elections System of the Virgin Islands Launches Online Voter Registration Portal

Secure and efficient, the platform enables users to register from anywhere while reducing paperwork and errors, making voting more accessible

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Officials demonstrate how to register online during the launch of the voter registration portal on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

On Thursday morning, the Elections System of the Virgin Islands launched its online voter registration portal.

“Adopting online voter registration reduces costs, enhances government efficiency, and builds more complete and accurate voter lists,” said Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes while

introducing the portal. Noting that registering voters online was pioneered by the state of Arizona in 2002, Ms. Fawkes said that the practice has grown significantly in the years since. “Forty-three states, Washington D.C. and Guam offer online voter registration,” said the Elections Supervisor. The U.S. Virgin Islands, on January 16, became the second territory to offer online registration to its voters.

Apart from the obvious benefit of increased convenience for the end user, online voter registration also benefits the ESVI by reducing paperwork and the risk of errors caused by indecipherable handwriting. “We hope to increase the registration rate,” Ms. Fawkes added. It is also hoped that increased voter turnout will also be a knock-on effect of the innovation. According to data collected in Arizona, over 70% of voter registration currently occurs online, and 94% of those who do register to vote online ultimately vote, she disclosed, as opposed to 85% in a manual registration system. Of note is the attractiveness of the online system to younger voters – the implementation of online voter registration in Arizona reportedly boosted registration rates among 18-24 year olds by 24 points. “We're elated that we're able to implement this process,” Ms. Fawkes declared.

On the portal, resident citizens will be able to register as a new voter, update their registration information, cancel their registration, or request an absentee ballot for an upcoming election, all from the comfort of their home, office, or the beach, if they choose. Explainer videos in English and Spanish for each process will be available on the ESVI website to guide users along. Any issues encountered during the online registration process will be forwarded to ESVI officials, who will then contact the individuals to assist them in resolving any problems they may encounter. Once the registration information has been submitted, it will be verified by ESVI staff and in two to five business days, the individual's voter registration status will have been updated. For a new voter, once their registration has been approved, they will have to make a trip to the ESVI offices should they wish to receive a voter identification card. However, not even that is strictly necessary, as Virgin Islanders are able to use any form of government-issued identification to vote.

With security concerns bound to be paramount in the minds of residents required to transmit personal information via an online system, Ms. Fawkes emphasized the provisions for data security that have been put in place. “The link that the data is coming on is a secure link, it comes in to our staff – only the staff has access via password,” she explained. In house, strict access control measures apply, with logs generated for each staff member that accesses voter records, and only one staff member allowed to work on any particular record at a time.

Noting that some voters may still, even in this digital age, not be comfortable using an online system to register, Ms. Fawkes reassured the public that in-office registration will still be available. However, she encouraged voters to at least try to use the new online option. “We are trying to be progressive here,” she stated. “We're moving forward into the 21st and 22nd centuries.”

The system was designed and developed by CrucianPoint, LLC, who will also be responsible for hosting and maintaining the portal. Funding for the project, which cost just over \$63,000, was provided by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission under the 2002 Help America Vote Act.