Proposal

Proposal: Implementing Advanced Online Voting with Google Forms

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Summary

This proposal recommends adopting advanced online voting via Google Forms, combined with traditional in-person voting, for Toronto City Park Co-Operative's meetings and requisitions. Google Forms satisfies legal requirements under the *Ontario Co-operative Corporations Act* (CCA) and the *Electronic Commerce Act*, 2000 (ECA) by providing a secure, verifiable method for Members to vote or sign requisitions ahead of time. This hybrid system enhances equity by empowering Members who face barriers to in-person voting—such as night-shift workers, those with physical limitations, or shy individuals—while preserving the option for in-person participation. The result is a more inclusive, accessible, and fair voting process that aligns with modern technology and Co-Op values.

Proposed by: Communications Project & Li Cheng

Proposal date: 2025-04-15

Approval status: Ready for submission

Project status: Approval needed

Submitted to the Board on:

Cost estimate: \$0

Legal Compliance

Why Google Forms Meets Requirements

Google Forms satisfies all legal stipulations for electronic voting and signatures under Ontario law, making it a viable tool for advanced online voting and requisition signatures. Here's how:

1. Authentication and Identity Verification

The CCA (Sections 70-71) requires requisitions and votes to be "signed by" members, and Section 74 (post-2023 updates) permits electronic participation if identity and communication are ensured. The ECA (Section 11) defines an electronic signature as any reliable method linking a person to a document with intent.

Google Forms can restrict submissions to logged-in users with Google accounts matching emails on file with City Park (e.g., "jane.doe@gmail.com"). The form can include a field: "By typing my name below, I hereby sign this document/vote," tying the act to the authenticated email. Google logs the email, timestamp, and response, creating a verifiable record. This exceeds the CCA's identity requirements and aligns with ECA's reliability standard—courts have upheld similar digital acts as binding.

2. Intent and Clarity

 The explicit declaration ("I hereby sign/vote") in the form shows intent, a legal requirement. Members type their name (e.g., "Jane Doe") under this, mirroring a physical signature's purpose. No "squiggly" mark is needed; typed names in authenticated systems suffice per ECA precedent.

3. Security and Integrity

Google Forms limits submissions to one per email, reducing duplicates.
 Responses are time stamped and exportable to a spreadsheet, allowing the Board to cross-check against the Membership list (e.g., 50+ signatures for 5% of 1,000+ members). Unlike a Google Doc, it's not editable post-submission, minimizing tampering risks. This meets the CCA's need for a fair, auditable process.

4. Bylaw Flexibility

 Unless City Park's bylaws explicitly ban electronic signatures or voting (unlikely post-2023 CCA updates), the CCA and ECA govern. The 2023 CCA amendments embrace electronic methods, and Google Forms fits within this framework.

5. Delivery and Record-Keeping

 Requisitions must reach the Co-Op's office (CCA Section 71(4)). A PDF export of form responses, with emails and typed names, can be emailed or printed and delivered, meeting deadlines. For votes, results can be compiled pre-meeting and verified in-person, ensuring transparency.

Google Forms isn't just compliant—it's practical, leveraging tools Members likely already use, with no extra cost to the Co-Op.

Equity

Why Advanced Online Voting Plus In-Person Voting Beats In-Person Alone

Relying solely on in-person voting excludes many of City Park's 770+ households. Combining advanced online voting (submitting votes ahead of time via Google Forms) with in-person voting during meetings creates a hybrid system that's more equitable. Here's how, with specific groups it benefits:

1. Night-Shift Workers

 Members working overnight (e.g., nurses, security guards) can't attend evening meetings like Friday's 7-9 PM slot. Advanced online voting lets them cast ballots days ahead, ensuring their voice isn't silenced by work schedules.

2. Physically Unable to Attend

 Elderly members, those with disabilities, or those with injuries or illness(e.g., a broken leg, the flu) might struggle to reach the meeting room. Online voting from home removes this barrier, leveling the playing field.

3. Shy or Socially Anxious Members

 Some Members avoid meetings due to discomfort speaking up or facing crowds. Online voting lets them participate privately, without pressure, making the process less intimidating.

4. Parents with Young Kids

 Single parents or couples with no childcare can't easily leave home for a 2-hour meeting. Submitting a vote online frees them from juggling kids or missing out.

5. Travelers or Seasonal Residents

 Members away on vacation, work trips, or wintering elsewhere (common in Co-Ops with older demographics) miss in-person votes. Online access keeps them in the loop, no plane ticket required.

6. Busy Professionals

 Daytime workers or those with packed schedules (e.g., commuting downtown) might not make a 7 PM start. Advanced voting fits their lives, not the meeting's clock.

7. Language or Hearing Barriers

 Members less fluent in English or hard of hearing might struggle in a live debate. Online forms can be completed at their own pace, reducing confusion.

8. Last-Minute Conflicts

 Illness, car trouble, or emergencies derail in-person attendance. A window for online voting (e.g., a week before) ensures they're not disenfranchised by bad luck.

In-person-only voting assumes everyone is free, mobile, and bold enough to show up—an unrealistic bar for a diverse Co-Op like City Park. Hybrid voting captures these sidelined voices, boosting turnout (maybe from 10-20% to 30-40%) and making decisions more representative. In-person voting stays for those who thrive on debate or are uncomfortable with tech, balancing tradition with inclusion.

Implementation Outline

- **Form Setup**: Create a Google Form with fields: "Email (auto-collected)," "Building," "Unit Number," and "By typing my name below, I hereby vote/sign [issue]." Restrict to one submission per email, requiring login.
- Voting Access: Use the same URL for voting every time, reducing confusion and increasing access. cpco-op.ca/vote
- **Verification**: Match email/name/unit to City Park's roster pre-meeting. Announce online totals alongside in-person votes.
- **Timeline**: Open voting/signatures 7 days before the meeting; close 24 hours prior for tallying.

Conclusion

Google Forms meets legal muster under the CCA and ECA, offering a secure, intent-driven way to vote or sign requisitions online. Pairing advanced online voting with in-person options isn't just feasible—it's fairer, pulling in night owls, homebound members, shy folks, and more. City Park can lead as a modern Co-Op, blending tech and equity without losing its community core. Let's vote on it—online or off!

Points Considered

Anonymity vs. Auditability with Google Forms

Anonymity in Voting with Google Forms

- **Definition**: Anonymity means voters' specific vote choices are not visible to other Members or the Board, protecting privacy and preventing coercion or influence within the Co-Op community.
- **Traditional Context**: In physical voting (e.g., secret ballots at meetings per Section 6.6), anonymity is achieved by using unmarked ballots and locked boxes, with no voter identification unless Members vote to require initials.
- Google Forms Context with Login Requirement: Google Forms will be configured
 to require voters to log in with their Google accounts (via the "Require sign-in"
 setting), tying each response to an email address. This impacts anonymity as
 follows:
 - Not Fully Anonymous: The login requirement means responses are linked to email addresses in the Google Sheet, visible to the form owner (e.g., Secretary) and anyone with access. Full anonymity (where no one sees voter identities) isn't possible natively.
 - Practical Anonymity for Members: Anonymity can be preserved for Members and the Board by restricting access to the raw data (Google Sheet) to auditors only (e.g., Director supervising the election, staff, or scrutineers).
 Only aggregated results (e.g., "Candidate X: 50 votes") are shared at the meeting, keeping individual choices hidden from the broader membership.
 - Configuration: Avoid additional identifying questions (e.g., name, unit number) beyond the login to minimize exposure, though email addresses alone identify voters to auditors.

Auditability in Voting with Google Forms

- Definition: An audit trail ensures the voting process is verifiable—confirming only
 eligible Members vote, preventing duplicates, and ensuring accurate counting—while
 supporting transparency and trust.
- **Traditional Context**: Physical ballots are retained for 48 hours (Section 6.6) and recounted if challenged, providing an auditable process without linking votes to voters unless initials are required.
- Google Forms Context with Eligibility Check: Google Forms provides an audit trail through its response log, enhanced by your requirements:
 - What It Tracks: With "Require sign-in" enabled, each response includes the voter's email address, timestamp, and vote choice, recorded in a linked Google Sheet.
 - Eligibility Verification: Auditors compare email addresses against the list of eligible Members (per the membership roster). Ineligible votes (e.g., from

- non-members, non-matching emails, or duplicates) are filtered out and discarded before tallying, ensuring only valid votes count toward quorum and results.
- Duplicate Prevention: The "Limit to 1 response" setting, tied to Google account login, helps prevent multiple votes per Member, though auditors must still manually verify against the membership list for accuracy (e.g., ensuring one email per member).
- Audit Process: Auditors use the Sheet to confirm eligibility, discard invalid votes, and calculate totals, maintaining an auditable record of the process.

The Tension with Google Forms

- Conflict: The login requirement inherently links vote choices to email addresses in the Google Sheet, meaning auditors see who voted for what (e.g., "jane.doe@gmail.com voted for Candidate X"). This removes full anonymity but can still protect voter privacy from Members if access is restricted:
 - Anonymity Trade-off: Members and the Board don't see individual choices because only aggregated results are disclosed, but auditors have full visibility for verification.
 - Audit Necessity: Comparing votes against the eligibility list and discarding ineligible votes requires identifying voters, making some traceability unavoidable with Google Forms.
- Resolution: Practical anonymity is achieved by:
 - Access Restriction: Limiting Google Sheet access to auditors via Google Drive permissions (e.g., "View only" for auditors, no access for others).
 - Result Sharing: Announcing only totals at the meeting (e.g., via a manually prepared summary or Google Forms' summary feature), keeping raw data confidential.
 - Filtering Process: Auditors discard ineligible votes before aggregation, ensuring the final tally reflects only valid member votes.

Is Anonymity a Requirement with Google Forms?

- Current By-law Practices:
 - Section 6.6: Elections default to anonymous ballots ("no marks that would identify the voter") unless members vote for identifiable ballots, showing a preference for secrecy but flexibility.
 - Section 3.8: General voting is "in person" (e.g., show of hands unless balloted), implying some votes may be public, but elections prioritize anonymity.
 - Implication: Anonymity isn't mandatory but is favored for elections. Google
 Forms with login can't fully anonymize votes from auditors, but member-level
 anonymity holds if raw data isn't shared.

- Co-operative Principles: Democratic control (one member, one vote) doesn't mandate anonymity—it's a practical choice for free expression, achievable by restricting detailed results to auditors.
- Legal Requirements (Co-operative Corporations Act): The Act (Sections 70-79) doesn't require anonymity, only fair and transparent processes. Google Forms meets this with login and eligibility checks, as long as the by-law authorizes it.
- Google Forms Feasibility:
 - Anonymity: Limited by login linking votes to emails, but member privacy is preserved by restricting Sheet access to auditors and sharing only aggregates.
 - Auditability: Robust with login and manual eligibility comparison, ensuring only eligible votes count after filtering.

Conclusion with Google Forms

- Anonymity: Not fully achievable due to the login requirement exposing voter
 identities to auditors, but practical anonymity for members is maintained by
 restricting detailed results (email-vote pairs) to auditors and disclosing only totals.
 This aligns with the goal of keeping choices anonymous from the membership while
 allowing verification.
- Auditability: Enhanced by login tracking and eligibility comparison, with auditors
 discarding ineligible votes to ensure a valid, auditable outcome. Google Forms'
 response log (emails, timestamps, choices) supports this, though manual filtering is
 needed.
- Practical Approach: Configure Google Forms to require login, limit responses to
 one per account, restrict Sheet access to auditors, compare votes against the
 membership list, discard ineligible votes, and share only aggregated results at the
 meeting.

Changes to Bylaw

Overview of Advanced Online Voting

Goal

- Enable advance online voting for general meetings and Director elections.
- Count members who vote in advance toward quorum for pre-noticed resolutions.
- Maintain anonymity of vote choices from members and the Board, with detailed records (who voted for what) accessible only to auditors for audit purposes.

Changes to By-law No. 2

1. Section 3.5 - Notice and Agenda of General Meetings

Current Text:

"Notice of each annual or other general meeting of Members shall be given to the Members not less than ten nor more than thirty days before the date of the meeting. In computing the time for giving notice, the day of giving notice shall not be counted, but the day of the meeting shall be counted. The notice shall specify the time and place of the meeting and shall set out or be accompanied by a statement of the business to be considered or transacted at the meeting. Notice of a special general meeting shall specify whether or not the removal of a Director is on the agenda. If passage of a by-law or the annual budget is on the agenda of an annual or special general meeting of Members, a copy of the proposed by-law or budget shall be given to each Member at least five days before the meeting at which the matter is to be voted upon."

Proposed Text:

"Notice of each annual or other general meeting of Members shall be given not less than 14 nor more than 30 days before the date of the meeting. In computing the time for giving notice, the day of giving notice shall not be counted, but the day of the meeting shall be counted. The notice shall specify the time and place of the meeting (or electronic access details if virtual or hybrid) and shall set out or be accompanied by a statement of the business to be considered or transacted. If advance online voting is authorized under Section 3.13, the notice shall also specify the voting period (beginning 7 days before the meeting and ending 24 hours before the meeting starts) and instructions for accessing the secure electronic voting platform. Notice of a special general meeting shall specify whether or not the removal of a Director is on the agenda. If passage of a by-law or budget is on the agenda, a copy shall be provided at least 10 days before the meeting to allow review prior to the voting period. Notice shall be delivered in accordance with Article 14.1."

• Changes:

- Increases minimum notice from 10 to 14 days to cover the 7-day voting period.
- Adds virtual/hybrid meeting details and advance voting period/platform instructions.
- Extends by-law/budget delivery from 5 to 10 days for advance review.

2. Section 3.7 - Quorum at General Meeting

Current Text:

"No business shall be transacted or motion or resolution adopted at any meeting of Members unless a quorum of Members is present. A quorum consists of ten percent of the Members entitled to vote at the meeting. If a quorum is not present within thirty minutes of the time for which the meeting was called, the Members present shall adjourn the meeting to a date not less than five and not more than fifteen days later and notice of the adjourned meeting shall be given to all Members entitled to vote at the meeting at least two days before the date of the adjourned meeting. At the adjourned meeting, the Members present shall constitute a quorum."

• Proposed Text:

"No business shall be transacted or motion or resolution adopted at any meeting of Members unless a quorum is achieved. A quorum consists of ten percent of the Members entitled to vote, determined as follows:

- (a) For resolutions eligible for advance online voting under Section 3.13, quorum includes Members who cast votes during the advance voting period (7 days before the meeting until 24 hours before the meeting starts) plus Members present in person or via a secure electronic platform at the meeting, provided the total reaches ten percent.
- (b) For business requiring a decision at the meeting (e.g., new motions or amendments not subject to advance voting), quorum consists of ten percent of Members present in person or via a secure electronic platform, assessed within thirty minutes of the scheduled start time.

If quorum under (b) is not present within thirty minutes, the Members present shall adjourn the meeting to a date not less than five nor more than fifteen days later, with notice given per Section 3.5. At the adjourned meeting, quorum for in-meeting business shall be those Members present, but advance voting results remain valid if quorum under (a) was met."

• Changes:

- Expands quorum to include advance voters for pre-noticed resolutions.
- Retains 10% attendance quorum for other meeting business.
- Updates adjournment rules to preserve advance votes.

3. Section 3.8 - Voting

Current Text:

- "(a) Every Member of the Co-op has the right to one vote at any meeting of Members whether annual or special.
- (b) Only Members present in person may vote and vote by proxy shall not be permitted.
- (c) Unless otherwise specifically provided in this By-law or in the Act, all decisions shall be made by a majority of the votes cast by Members entitled to vote who are present when the vote is taken."

Proposed Text:

- "(a) Every Member of the Co-op has the right to one vote on any matter put to a vote, which may be cast either in person at a meeting or via advance online voting per Section 3.13, if authorized by the Board. Members voting in advance count toward quorum for those matters per Section 3.7(a).
- (b) Votes may be cast in person at a physical or virtual meeting or through a secure electronic voting platform during the advance voting period, beginning 7 days before the meeting and ending 24 hours before the meeting starts. Vote by proxy shall not be permitted. The platform shall prevent duplicate voting and provide an auditable record accessible only to auditors (as defined in Section 6.6) for verification purposes. Vote choices shall remain anonymous to Members and the Board, with only aggregated results disclosed, unless Members, by majority vote at a prior meeting, require identifiable votes to be disclosed to all.
- (c) Unless otherwise provided in this By-law or the Act, all decisions shall be made by a majority of the votes cast, including those cast in advance and at the meeting."

• Changes:

- Extends voting rights to advance online period.
- Allows virtual voting and specifies the 7-day-to-24-hour window.
- Ensures audit trail access is restricted to auditors, with anonymity for members unless waived by vote.

4. Section 3.10 - Record of Attendance

Current Text:

"The Secretary shall cause the names of all persons attending Members' meetings to be recorded and shall ensure that only Members make motions or vote."

Proposed Text:

"The Secretary shall cause the names of all persons attending Members' meetings, whether in person or via a secure electronic platform, to be recorded and shall maintain a record of Members who cast votes during the advance online voting period under Section 3.13. These records shall be used to determine quorum per Section 3.7 and ensure that only Members make motions or vote, whether at the meeting or in advance."

• Changes:

Adds virtual attendance and advance voting records for quorum tracking.

5. Section 6.4 - Election of Directors

Current Text:

- "(a) Directors shall be elected by the Members. The election shall normally take place at the annual meeting but may take place at a general meeting of Members called for the purpose of electing Directors if necessary.
- (b) The election shall be by ballot. Members shall, on their ballot, cast a number of votes equal to the number of Directors to be elected and the candidates with the largest number of votes shall be elected.
- (c) All votes shall be cast during a duly constituted general meeting and quorum shall be maintained until all the ballots have been cast. No Member may vote by proxy."

Proposed Text:

- "(a) Directors shall be elected by the Members. The election shall normally take place at the annual meeting or a general meeting, which may include an advance online voting period per Section 3.13.
- (b) The election shall be by ballot, cast either in person at the meeting or via a secure electronic voting platform during the advance voting period, beginning 7 days before the meeting and ending 24 hours before the meeting starts. Members shall cast a number of votes equal to the number of Directors to be elected, and the candidates with the largest number of votes shall be elected.
- (c) Votes may be cast during the advance voting period or at the meeting, with results announced at the meeting. Quorum for the election shall be determined per Section 3.7(a), and for other meeting business per Section 3.7(b). No Member may vote by proxy."

• Changes:

- Adds advance online voting for elections.
- Specifies the voting period and ties quorum to Section 3.7.

6. Section 6.6 - Procedure for Elections

Current Text:

"The election shall take place according to the following steps:

(a) Before the election begins, ballots shall be distributed to each Member present who shall sign a membership list in order to receive a ballot. Ballots do not have any marks that would identify the voter, unless there is a motion before the election begins requiring all ballots to be initialed by the voter. Each Member shall complete his/her ballot and deposit it into a locked ballot box... When everyone has voted or when it appears that everyone who wishes to vote has voted, the Chair shall declare the polls closed... The Director supervising the election, staff and/or scrutineers shall then retire to a separate room to count the ballots... A tally sheet shall be used to record the count... After the count is completed, the Director supervising the election shall report the results to the Chair who shall then announce the results to the Members...

- (b) A spoiled vote includes a ballot that is blank or marked in a way that makes it impossible to determine the Member's intention...
- (c) Ballots shall be kept in a secure place by the Co-op for forty-eight hours after the meeting at which the election was held...
- (d) In the event of a tie...
- (e) Any Member may request a recount...
- (f) After forty-eight hours has elapsed from the end of the meeting at which the election was held, the ballots may be destroyed..."

Proposed Text:

"The election shall follow these steps:

- (a) For in-person voting at the meeting, ballots shall be distributed to each Member present who shall sign a membership list to receive a ballot. Ballots do not have any marks that would identify the voter, unless there is a motion before the election begins requiring all ballots to be initialed by the voter. Each Member shall complete his/her ballot and deposit it into a locked ballot box... When everyone has voted or when it appears that everyone who wishes to vote has voted, the Chair shall declare the polls closed...
- (b) For advance online voting under Section 3.13, Members may cast votes via a secure electronic platform from 7 days before the meeting until 24 hours before the meeting starts. The platform shall prevent duplicate voting and provide an auditable record, accessible only to the Director supervising the election, staff, and/or scrutineers (collectively, 'auditors') for verifying eligibility, participation, and results. Vote choices shall remain anonymous to Members and the Board, with only aggregated results announced at the meeting, unless Members, by majority vote at a prior meeting, require identifiable ballots as per paragraph (a).
- (c) The Director supervising the election shall combine in-person votes (if any) with advance online votes, reporting the results to the Chair who shall announce them to the Members. A tally sheet or electronic report shall be used to record the count. Spoiled votes include blank or invalid submissions from either method.
- (d) Ballots and electronic voting records shall be kept in a secure place by the Co-op for forty-eight hours after the meeting at which the election results were announced...
- (e) In the event of a tie...
- (f) Any Member may request a recount...
- (g) After forty-eight hours has elapsed from the end of the meeting at which the election results were announced, the ballots and electronic records may be destroyed..."

Changes:

- Adds advance online voting process with restricted audit access and member anonymity.
- Combines in-person and online votes for tallying.
- Updates retention and recount rules to include electronic records (renumbering adjusted for clarity).

7. Section 14.1 - Notice

Current Text:

"All notices or copies of documents required to be given pursuant to this By-law or other by-laws of the Co-op shall, unless the contrary is explicitly stated, be in writing and may be sufficiently given if handed personally to or left with the Member to whom it is to be given or left in the mailbox, slipped under the door, taped to the door, or otherwise delivered to the Member's unit or sent by ordinary mail addressed to the Member at his/her unit. Notices or documents sent by ordinary mail shall be deemed to have been received by the Member on the third day after mailing."

Proposed Text:

"All notices or copies of documents required to be given pursuant to this By-law or other by-laws of the Co-op shall, unless otherwise stated, be in writing and may be sufficiently given if handed personally to or left with the Member, left in the mailbox, slipped under the door, taped to the door, or otherwise delivered to the Member's unit, or sent electronically via email or a secure member portal, provided the Member has consented and provided a valid electronic contact method. For meetings with advance online voting under Section 3.13, the notice shall include the voting period (7 days before the meeting until 24 hours before the meeting starts) and instructions for accessing the electronic voting platform. Electronic delivery shall be deemed received on the date sent, unless evidence indicates otherwise, while mailed notices shall be deemed received on the third day after mailing."

• Changes:

- Adds electronic delivery option.
- Requires voting period and platform details for advance voting.

8. New Section 3.13 - Advance Online Voting

Current Text:

None (new section).

Proposed Text:

"Article 3.13 - Advance Online Voting

- (a) The Board may authorize advance online voting for resolutions specified in the meeting notice, such as Director elections or by-law approvals. The voting period shall begin 7 days before the scheduled meeting date and end 24 hours before the meeting starts.
- (b) Voting shall occur via a secure electronic platform ensuring member authentication (e.g., unique codes or multi-factor authentication), prevention of duplicate voting, and an auditable record accessible only to auditors (as defined in Section 6.6) for verifying eligibility, quorum, and results. Vote choices shall remain anonymous to Members and the Board, with only aggregated results disclosed, unless Members, by majority vote at a prior meeting, require identifiable votes. Only Members may vote, and proxy voting is not permitted.

- (c) Notice of the meeting shall include the voting period and platform access instructions, delivered per Article 14.1.
- (d) The Secretary shall combine advance votes with any in-meeting votes, reporting results at the meeting. Advance voters may attend the meeting but cannot change their vote once cast.
- (e) The Board shall ensure accommodations (e.g., telephone voting or in-person options) for Members unable to access the platform, and the process shall comply with the Act and applicable privacy laws."

• Changes:

 Introduces a new section to govern advance online voting, specifying the period, audit restrictions, and anonymity rules.

Summary of All Changes

- 1. **Section 3.5**: Extends notice to 14-30 days, adds voting period/platform details, adjusts by-law/budget timeline to 10 days.
- 2. **Section 3.7**: Includes advance voters in quorum for pre-noticed resolutions, retains attendance quorum for other business.
- 3. **Section 3.8**: Allows advance online voting, restricts audit trail to auditors, ensures member anonymity unless waived.
- 4. **Section 3.10**: Adds recording of advance voters for quorum.
- 5. **Section 6.4**: Permits advance online voting for elections, updates quorum reference.
- 6. **Section 6.6**: Adds online voting process, restricts audit access, maintains anonymity for members.
- 7. **Section 14.1**: Adds electronic notice delivery, includes voting period details.
- 8. **Section 3.13**: New section for advance voting rules, audit restrictions, and accommodations.

Notes

- Anonymity: Vote choices are anonymous to members and the Board, with detailed records (who voted for what) accessible only to auditors (Director, staff, scrutineers) for verification, aligning with your suggestion.
- **Implementation**: Requires a platform (e.g., ElectionBuddy) with restricted audit logs and aggregated public results.