

Every Minute Counts: Voter Operations & Experience

Entrance/Exit

2026 EDITION

This guide provides detailed information on how to utilize the application featuring the digital timer, including timer interface elements and process descriptions.

PROCESS STEPS

01

Start

02

Stop

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APP TESTING

It is recommended that you test the app prior to official data collection to become familiar with the process steps and interface. When you are testing the app, please indicate this by typing “TEST” into all text field inputs on the polling place questionnaire. Please also write “TEST” in the notes for the Start step of each observation. This will ensure that these times are not falsely included in any final analyses and are properly removed from the database.

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Introduction

Elections in the United States are run by thousands of local jurisdictions, each with their own voting methods, staffing requirements, location layouts, and procedures. As a result, what is understood about the voting process tends to come from isolated reports. Collecting systematic, comparable data is essential to the study of American elections, helping to improve accessibility, reduce administrative burden, mitigate associated costs, and strengthen public trust in the system.

Every Minute Counts: Voter Operations & Experience (EMC*VOX) supports this need by standardizing the collection of systematic data on the voting process at scale. The project brings together a cross-institutional team of researchers from universities across the United States to observe polling places at voting sites nationwide.

To do this, the Engineering for Democracy Institute, in collaboration with the Elections Research Center, has developed a digital timer application specifically programmed to represent the unique stages of the voting process in each state.

This guide provides detailed information on how to utilize the application featuring the digital timer, including timer interface elements and process descriptions.



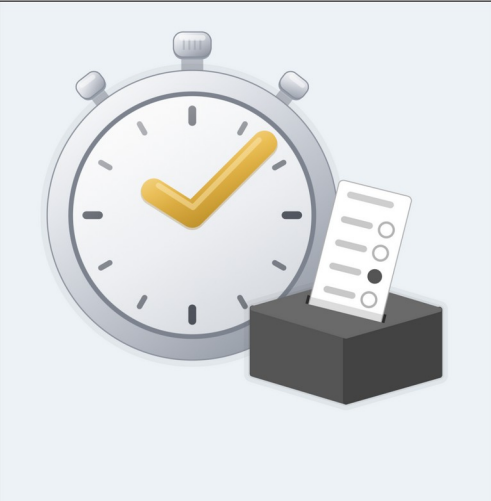
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Signing In

Each participant will be assigned a unique username and password by the university faculty lead, which will connect them to their specific state's process steps. Once signed in, participants will be able to see a list of all the polling places where data collection was previously recorded or add a new location.

APP TESTING

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Welcome Back

Enter the username and password to continue.

Username

Password

Sign In

Click to sign into the app after your assigned username and password have been entered

All participants will be assigned a unique username and password to access their state's version of the timer

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Home Screen

Once signed in, you will be brought to the timer home screen. On the home screen, you will be able to navigate to any polling place you have already collected voter wait times at, as well as “Add a new location” when visiting a polling place for the first time.



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Polling Place Questionnaire

Before beginning data collection, each user needs to fill out the polling place questionnaire which includes questions about the location. If there are multiple participants collecting data at the same polling place, agree on all answers on the setup questionnaire before submitting to ensure consistency across data.

Along with the questionnaire, each team needs one paper drawing of the polling place exterior indicating key elements such as entrance and exit doors, their observer area, and the parking lot. Drawings should be made on the attached Polling Place Exterior Layout Sketch sheet.



The screenshot shows the 'Setup' screen of the 'Polling Place' app. The title is 'Polling Place' with a subtitle 'Enter information about the polling place.' The form contains the following fields and questions:

- Polling Place Location Name:** A text input field with the example 'e.g. Lincoln Elementary School'.
- What is the precinct/ward number(s) at this location?** A text input field with the example 'e.g. 12, 14A'. A note below says 'If multiple, separate with commas (e.g. 1573, 3842, 1072)'.
- Building Type:** A dropdown menu with the option 'Select building type'.
- Are you currently observing during the early voting period or on Election Day?** Two radio button options: 'Early Voting' and 'Election Day'.
- From how far away from the polling location are you observing?** A text input field with the example 'e.g. 50 feet'. A note below says 'Please estimate if you are unsure of the exact distance and include the unit of measurement.'
- Are there other organizations outside the polling location campaigning for candidates?** Two radio button options: 'Yes' and 'No'.
- Do voters enter and exit the polling location through the same doorway?** Two radio button options: 'Yes' and 'No'.
- Make a paper drawing of the polling place and submit to the lead professor and EDI once you have left the location.** A text instruction.
- Continue to Timer:** A blue button at the bottom.

Annotations with arrows point to various elements:

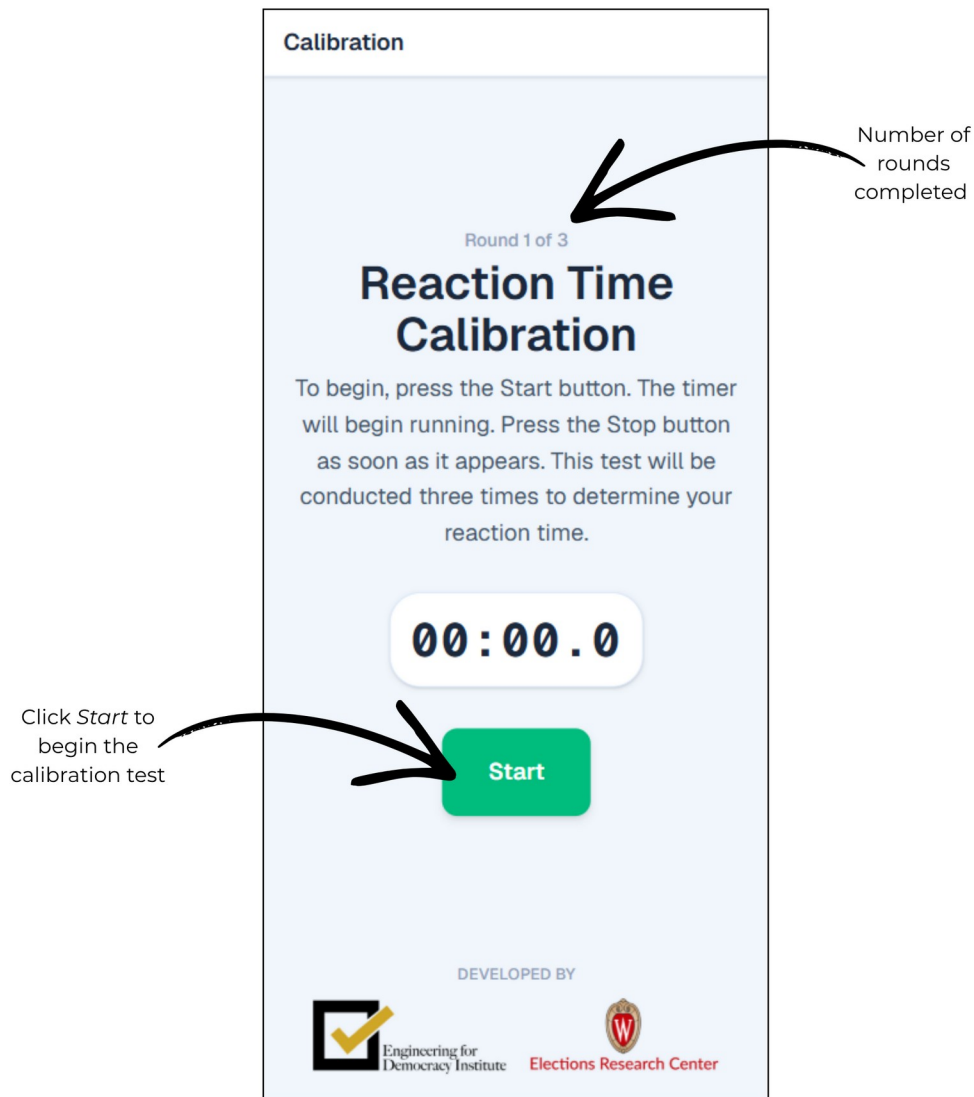
- 'App navigation toggle providing access to the home screen and other app features' points to the hamburger menu icon.
- 'Text input for the name of the polling place' points to the 'Polling Place Location Name' field.
- 'Text input to indicate what precinct/ward/poll is voting at the location' points to the precinct/ward number field.
- 'Dropdown to indicate what type of building is being used for the polling place' points to the 'Building Type' dropdown.
- 'Text input to indicate the distance you are standing at to observe voters; include units' points to the distance field.
- 'Indicate when you are collecting this data' points to the radio button options for voting period.
- 'Indicate if these cases are true at this polling place' points to the radio button options for campaigning and doorway.
- 'Advance to the timer once all questions are answered and the sketch is drawn' points to the 'Continue to Timer' button.
- 'Reminder to sketch a drawing of the polling place' points to the instruction about making a paper drawing.

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Reaction Time Calibration

Before starting the time study, each user will be prompted to complete a reaction test to account for that participant's reaction delay, which will be factored into the final analysis.

Participants will complete the reaction test three times by clicking the STOP button when it appears on screen. Once the test is complete, users will be immediately directed to the voting process timer.



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Timer Interface

The following features are available to you while using the timer.

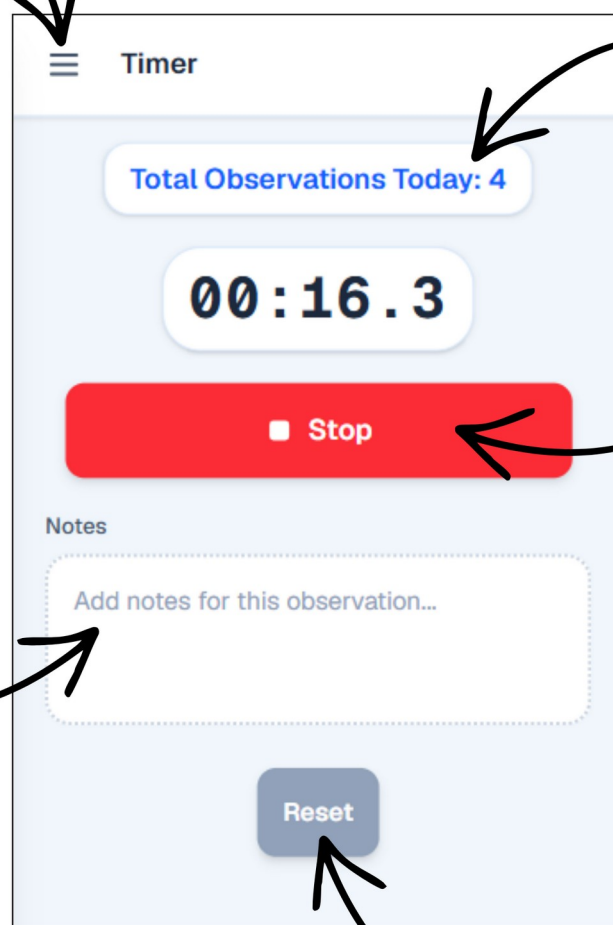
App navigation
toggle providing
access to the home
screen and other app
features

Total number of
observations
collected today
at the current
location

Stops the timer
and stores the
voter's voting time

Editable text input
for written
comments about
the observation

Resets the timer
and deletes all
data associated
with the
observation



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Process Steps

Below, you will find details explaining when each element of the timer should be used. Each process includes a description and details regarding when the timer should be started and stopped to track each step.

01 Start

Start initiates the timer.

To promote an unbiased, randomized selection of observed voters, study participants should begin timing the process for the next voter that walks through the door once they have completed the previous voter observation.

If observing at the same location as other study participants, ensure that each timed voter is different and that no two observers are timing the same voter.

Start Timer

Begin timing when the voter walks through the doorway. If the line extends outside of the building, start timing once the voter enters the line.

If you are with other observers for this study, come to a mutual agreement on where this starting point is to ensure consistent data collection.

02 Stop

Stop ends the timer.

This indicates that the voter has completed the entire voting process, or had decided to leave the polling place for some other reason. If you know why the voter leaves without voting, please write the reason in the Notes section.

Stop Timer

Stop timing when the voter walks back through the exit doorway and is back outside.

If you are with other observers for this study, come to a mutual agreement on where the stopping point is to ensure consistent data collection.

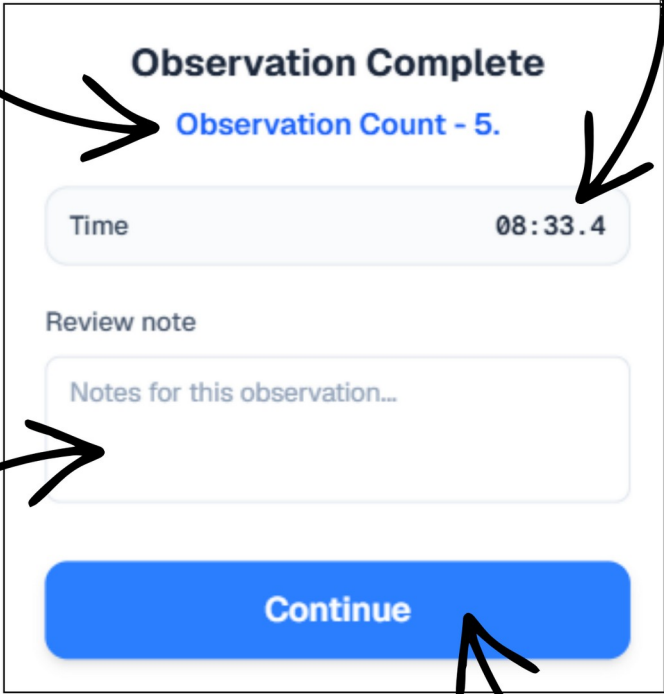
NOTE

Do not include identifying voter information in the Notes section, such as physical characteristics, name, address, or political affiliations.

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

End Observation Review

After the timing data for the entire voting process is stored, a screen will appear displaying the total time spent by the voter at the polling place. Users will have the ability to edit and add notes about the process when on this screen. Once the data has been reviewed and updated if necessary, the data will be submitted and stored to the study database.



The screenshot shows the 'Observation Complete' screen. It displays the 'Observation Count - 5.' in blue text. Below this is a 'Time' field showing '08:33.4'. There is a 'Review note' section with a text box containing 'Notes for this observation...'. At the bottom is a large blue 'Continue' button. Annotations with arrows point to these elements:

- Total number of observations collected today at this location, including the current observation** points to the 'Observation Count - 5.'.
- Total time collected during the voter observation** points to the 'Time' field showing '08:33.4'.
- Editable text box so users can edit notes written during timing or add notes that were missed** points to the 'Review note' text box.
- Save and store the timer data and notes and advance to a new timer** points to the 'Continue' button.

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Data Collection Tips

In preparation for data collection:

- Download the app to your phone
- Test signing in and using the app prior to data collection (include “TEST” in notes and text boxes)
- Bring a fully charged phone and a portable charger
- Turn off sleep or screen timers (Auto Lock Timer on iPhone) on phone to prevent it from turning off while timing
- Bring a water bottle and snacks/lunch
- Bring all paperwork and writing utensils necessary for data collection
- Wear closed, comfortable shoes

During data collection:

- Remain in the designated observer area
- Keep a distance from the voter you are observing
- Do not express any opinions towards the process or political affiliation, including any clothes or accessories
- Do not take pictures or videos of the space
- Do not speak to the media or other observers about the project. If they are interested, provide the project website link: <https://elections.wisc.edu/everyminutecounts/>
- Do not make assumptions about what you are allowed to do or where you can go
 - If unsure, check with a poll worker first, if applicable
- Remember: you are a guest in their space – be kind and considerate of the space and workers

FACULTY LEAD SECTION

Topics to Cover with Participants

The following are topics that should be covered with study participants by the university faculty lead prior to collecting data. These are topics in which the requirement, response, or action may vary depending on local and state requirements.

All participants should be instructed on the following:

- Local regulations for election observers
 - If students will be collecting data from outside the polling place, discuss the legal distance they are required to be from the building entrance, if applicable
- State and local policies on speaking to voters and poll workers
- The preferred responses if participants are asked about the project by voters, press, poll workers, and/or election officials
- Response if poll workers are uncomfortable with students observing
 - EDI recommends leaving the polling place and visiting another location to prevent any confrontation or discomfort from either party
- Necessary paperwork/permissions that may need to be shared with poll workers upon arrival at the polling place
- Appropriate clothing (no political themes, weather appropriate (if applicable), etc.)
 - Depending on your area, you may want to recommend that students wear university branded clothing to help poll workers identify them as a part of the study

Entrance/Exit

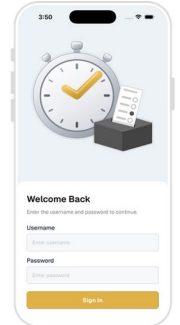
Bring to the Polling Place

☐ The App

REQUIRED

Download the app to your phone

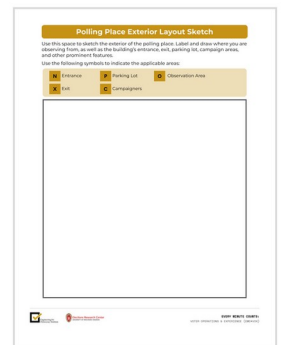
Bring a fully charged phone and a portable charger



☐ Polling Place Exterior Layout Sketch Sheet

REQUIRED

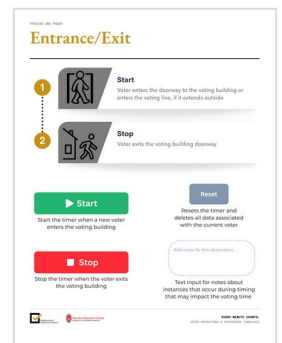
Each team needs one paper drawing of the polling place exterior indicating key elements such as entrance and exit doors, their observer area, and the parking lot.



☐ Entrance/Exit Process One Pager

OPTIONAL • HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A printable, one page description of the process steps for the Entrance/Exit timer. The page also includes reminders of the main timer button features and when they should be used.



Polling Place Exterior Layout Sketch

Use this space to sketch the exterior of the polling place. Label and draw where you are observing from, as well as the building's entrance, exit, parking lot, campaign areas, and other prominent features.

Use the following symbols to indicate the applicable areas:

N

Entrance

P

Parking Lot

O

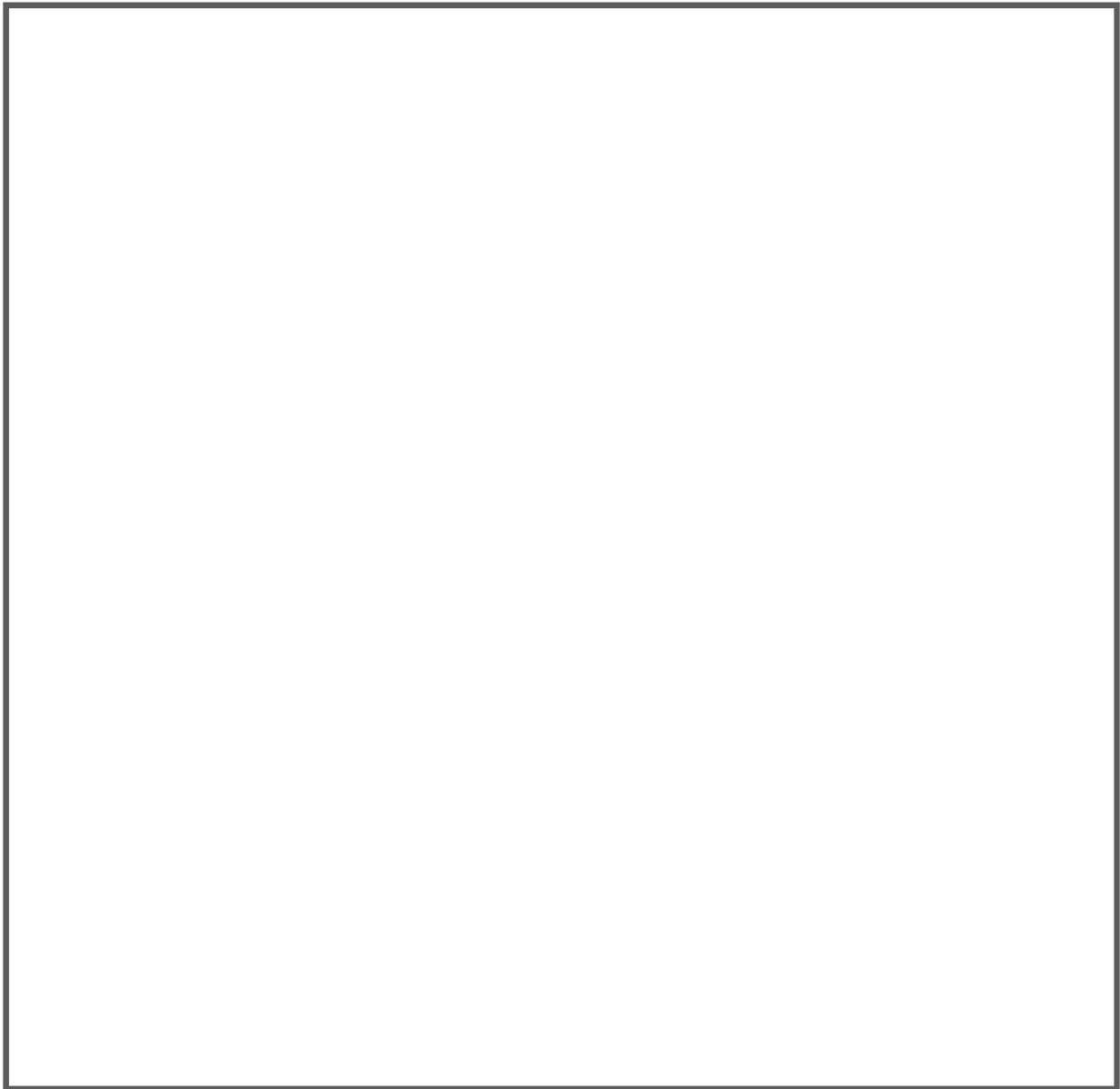
Observation Area

X

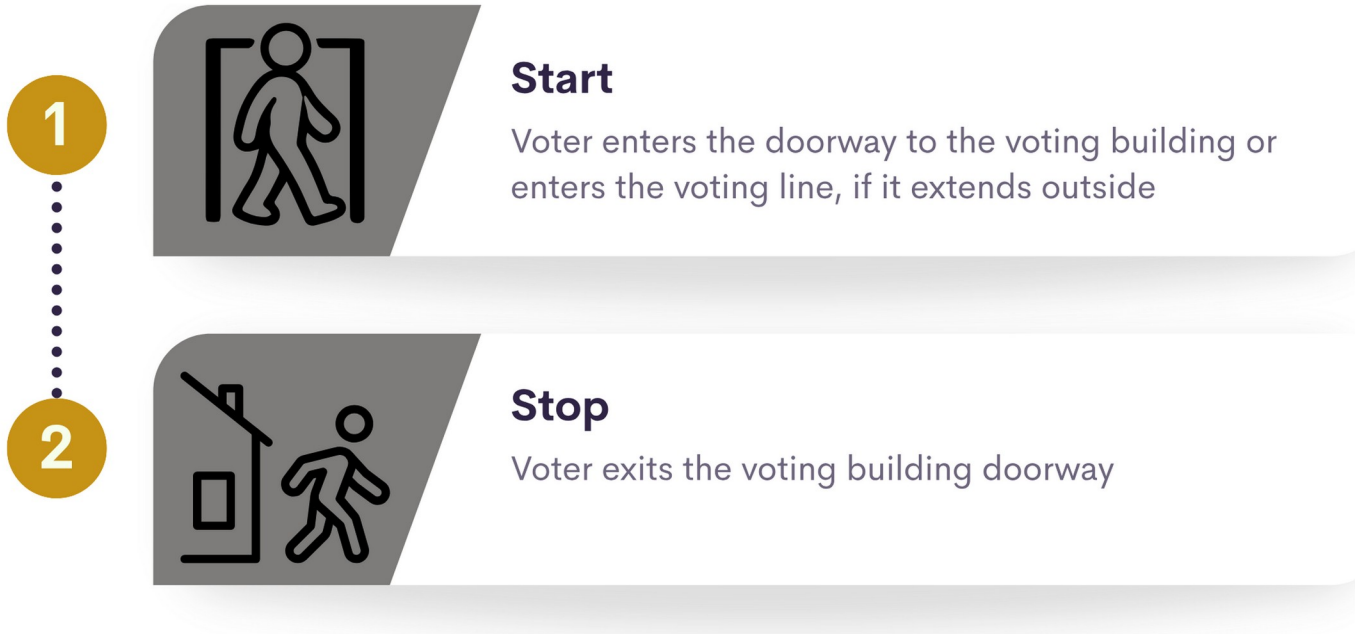
Exit

C

Campaigners



Entrance/Exit



Start the timer when a new voter enters the voting building



Resets the timer and deletes all data associated with the current voter



Stop the timer when the voter exits the voting building

Add notes for this observation...

Text input for notes about instances that occur during timing that may impact the voting time