

# OSDV Foundation | Primer

## Background Profile on the Cause & Movement



The Open Source Digital Voting (OSDV) Foundation ([www.osdv.org](http://www.osdv.org)) is a non-profit public benefits corporation that is developing publicly owned elections technology. The Foundation's flagship effort, the **TrustTheVote™ Project** ([www.trustthevote.org](http://www.trustthevote.org)), is developing open source elections technology to increase accuracy, transparency, verification and security and ultimately, public trust, as an alternative to current use of closed, proprietary, commercial voting systems.

### A Little History

The OSDV Foundation was founded in **November 2006** by Gregory A. Miller and E. John Sebes, when Greg and John recognized that:

- The for-profit voting system market had become wholly dysfunctional and malformed with no incentive to innovate, with near-complete vendor power over severely under-served customers: U.S. elections officials tasked with conducting public elections—nearly all of which are now and henceforth, by definition, “too close to call.” In support of this observation four years ago, now the situation has worsened to the point that today, nearly 85% of the nation’s public elections technology is served principally by two vendors, and innovation amongst these incumbents amounts to a negotiation for spare parts.
- The for-profit voting system market had acquired high barriers to entry, with increased and costly regulatory burdens, a small (and mostly fixed size) addressable market, increasingly underfunded customers, and no means for a new entrant to both better serve customers and public.
- There was a direct conflict of interests between the shareholder and business interest of for-profit vendors of closed proprietary voting system product, and the public interest of voters and elections officials seeking reliable cost-effective technology that provides transparency of election operations.
- Given these market structural defects and yet the imperative agenda for accuracy, transparency, verification, and security in what amounts to this Nation’s critical democracy infrastructure, there was observed a need for a non-commercial solution and a great opportunity for an open source elections technology framework.

As a result, the OSDV Foundation was founded as an organization with a technology development and delivery mission, and formed as a non-profit organization, structurally similar to the non-profit organizations that support open non-proprietary software like the Firefox browser, the Apache Web server, and the Linux operating system. Accordingly, the OSDV Foundation was incorporated as a California Public Benefits Corporation claiming tax-exempt status under §501.c.3 of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

## **Brief Overview**

As a technology organization, OSDV Foundation activities are focused on designing, developing, and building elections technology that supports the public interest and meets the needs of election officials. As a public benefits organization, the Foundation conducts its work to meet the needs of stakeholders comprised of state and local elections organizations, and other voting systems experts across the United States. Technology development is focused on a reference implementation of an elections technology framework — a holistic body of software to address all aspects of the ballot eco-system from voter registration and ballot design, to elections administration and management, to ballot casting, polling place administration, counting, tabulation, and audit/verification.

The resulting software technology is publicly owned, subject to an OSDV Public License, which provides State, county, or other elections jurisdiction the ability to adopt without license fees any or all of the election technology as their platform for elections administration and management, and subsequently have the technology adapted to fulfill their jurisdictional requirements and specifications.

The OSDV Foundation has made great progress in its first four years of existence. Milestones for the previous year include:

- In 2009 earned the backing and support of the Kapur Foundation to advance the cause and generate the movement behind open source technology, as a solution to creating publicly owned accurate, transparent, verifiable, and secure elections and voting technology.
- In 2010 raised and invested over a half a million dollars in developing the TrustTheVote Project open source elections technology framework (*an ~125% increase over 2009 donations*);
- Deployed open source elections technology into a production setting in two jurisdictions, District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Obtained expressions of interest jurisdictions in half a dozen states, to adopt OSDV Foundation developed elections technology in 2011.
- Established TrustTheVote voter registration technology as the solution of choice for a majority of the 3<sup>rd</sup> party registration services nationwide; the RockTheVote deployment served over 200,000 voters in 2010.

- Made demonstrative progress on the elections technology framework itself well beyond registration and election management into the Ballot Design Studio, design and prototyping for the Tabulator and a digital Poll-book.
- Building on previous year's work on voting system risk assessment as a subcontractor to the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission ("EAC" [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov)), we have joined an EAC- and NIST-led standards body for common data formats, with the only open software implementation of these emerging standards. (NIST is the National Institute for Standards and Technology see: <http://www.nist.gov/itl/vote/index.cfm>)
- Won a technology achievement award (a "Codie") from the Open Source for America Foundation for our work on the open source elections technology framework.
- Have raised the interest of the Ford Foundation in a significant backing of the OSDV Foundation and TrustTheVote Project in 2011.
- Was invited and responded to a significant request for proposal to supply an open source elections night reporting system for Travis County, TX.

A more detailed list of achievements for 2010 alone is available on the TrustTheVote blog at <http://www.trustthevote.org/2011-a-look-ahead-another-glance-back> and <http://www.trustthevote.org/welcome-2011-the-movement-continues>