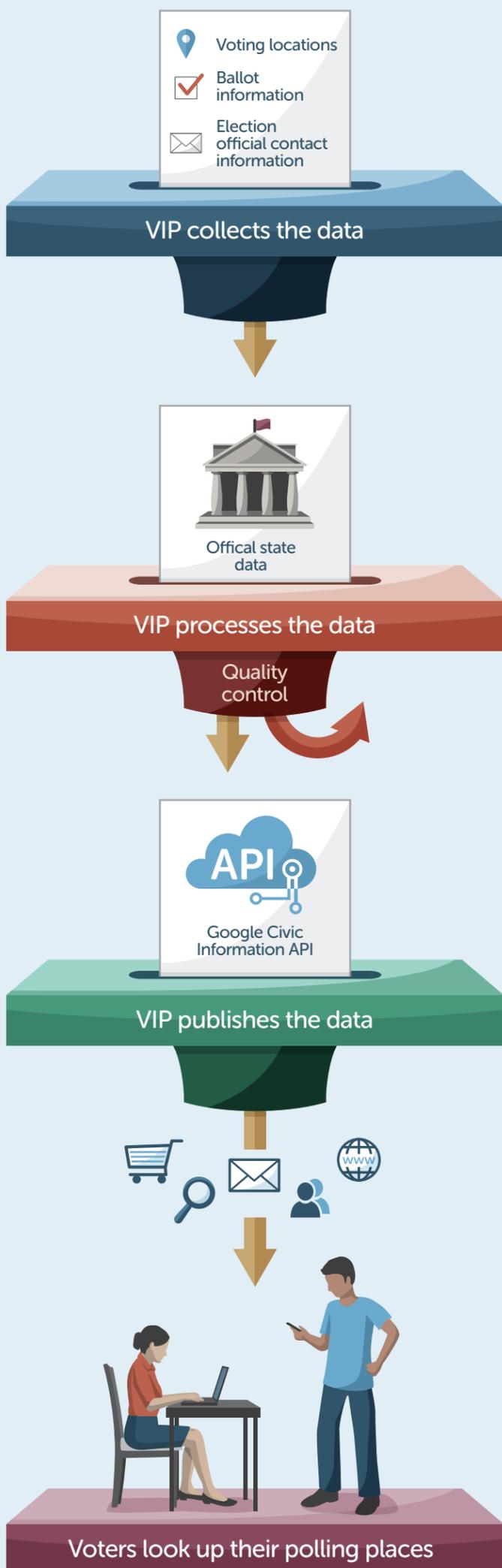# Voting Information Project Data Flow

Overview

The Voting Information Project (VIP) works with states to ensure that Americans can easily find official voting information where they look for it most: online. VIP, a partnership of The Pew Charitable Trusts, Google, and states, aims to provide voters with answers to basic questions such as, "Where is my polling place?" and "What's on my ballot?"

VIP uses an open format to make election data available and accessible and cutting-edge technology to ensure that all eligible voters have the information they need to cast their ballots. This highly technical initiative involves the standardization, validation, and publication of state election data.

How Does the Voting Information Project Work?

The process for providing on-demand official elections data to voters

Voting locations

Ballot information

Election official contact information

VIP collects the data

Offical state data

VIP processes the data

Quality control

API

Google Civic Information API

VIP publishes the data

WWW

Voters look up their polling places

VIP collects the data

The Voting Information Project (VIP) collects and aggregates voting locations, ballot information, and election administration contact information and makes it available to voters across the internet. Voting locations can include Election Day polling places, early vote sites, vote centers, and ballot drop boxes.

State election officials extract data from their election management systems after voting locations and ballots are finalized—usually about 45 days before an election. They then export this data according to VIP's specifications and upload, manually or automatically, the resulting data file to VIP's servers.

VIP processes the data

After a state uploads its files, VIP's data processing pipeline scans them for errors, such as missing ZIP codes or data that does not conform to VIP's specifications, and for structural issues in the feed, such as a precinct that is missing voting locations or a locality without contact information for election administrators. After performing these validations, VIP converts the data to XML.

When processing is complete, VIP sends state election officials an email asking them to log in to their private VIP data dashboard to review and correct the identified errors and submit corrected data for reprocessing. Once the state's data meets completeness and quality thresholds, the XML file is stored on VIP's servers.
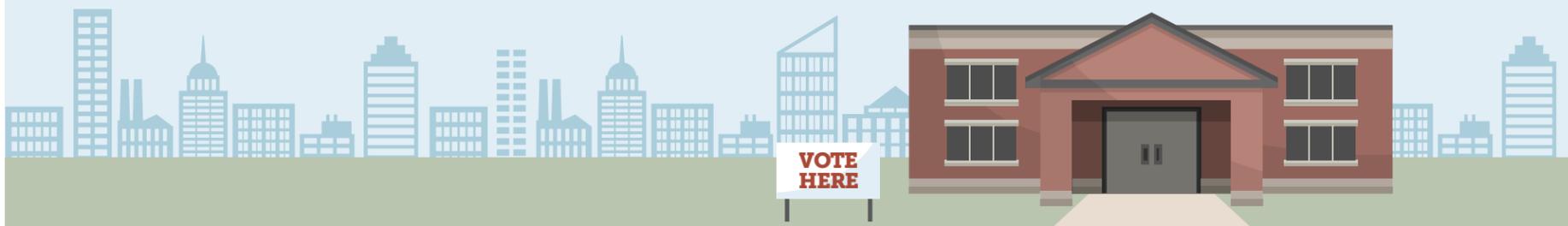
VIP publishes the data

Google, the primary consumer of VIP data, makes the information publicly available through its Civic Information API—a tool that powers various user-friendly applications across the web—after running additional tests. The data may then be placed in a "staging" version of VIP's Voting Information Tool, a customizable, embeddable widget, allowing states to see how it would look to end users. While in staging, a limited set of users, including election officials and the VIP team, test the feed. If errors are found, the state may be required to provide a corrected file.

Once the state, VIP, and Google are satisfied with the staged feed, the VIP team seeks permission to take the feed live. If the state grants permission, the data becomes publicly available.

Voters look up their polling places

As Election Day approaches, voters can easily find accurate, official answers to the questions "Where do I vote?" and "What's on my ballot?" on websites and via social media. This includes internet search sites such as Google; social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Foursquare; media websites including CBS News, AOL, and Univision; and even consumer and product sites like Etsy, MTV, and Doritos.

In 2016, voters accessed VIP's online information more than 123 million times across the internet. State and local governments, businesses, media companies, nonprofits, and other civic-minded organizations also shared VIP's Voting Information Tool and pointed users to VIP's GetToThePolls.com website.

VOTE HERE

This overview was updated on July 18, 2017, to reflect changes to the process.

For further information, please visit:

pewtrusts.org/elections

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