

U.S. Election Assistance Commission

Quick Start Management Guide on Elections Office Administration

The Quick Start Management Guide on Elections Office Administration is part of a series of brochures designed to highlight and summarize the information contained in the chapters of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) *Election Management Guidelines (EMG)*. The goal of the EMG is to provide a collection of administrative practices, consolidated into one document, to assist State and local election officials to effectively manage and administer elections. These guidelines are designed solely to serve as a source of information for election officials. However, due to the need for election management resources, Quick Starts are released as they are completed.

The content of the EMG and the Quick Start Management Guides has been developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation to ensure that the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

Introduction

- Managing an elections office is a full-time job with some of the most complex responsibilities expected of a public servant.
- When not preparing for an election, elections offices handle tasks similar to other governmental agencies. The tasks include data entry, processing incoming and outgoing mail, responding to telephone and in-person requests for information, accounting/payroll duties, staff recruitment and training, etc.
- In many "elections offices," the administration of elections is just one of the offices' many responsibilities and duties. Many election officials are also the clerk, recorder, and/or treasurer of the jurisdiction. These multi-function offices face additional burdens because they tend to exist in very small jurisdictions with few full-time staff members and tight budgets.
- Federal, State, and local laws govern how elections are conducted. A change in these laws may have a significant impact on the processes and resources available to manage an election. The timing of any change in the law can create additional challenges in properly administering an election.
- This Quick Start on Elections Office Administration will provide election officials with some recommended practices for managing the internal functions of an elections office. The following sections cover internal processes and procedures, facilities and equipment management, staffing, budgeting, and data collection.

Managing Internal Processes

- Develop written policies and procedures for each division and/or area of responsibility. Examples include: voter registration; absentee voting; polling

- place operations; poll worker recruitment, training and assignments; early voting/vote center operations; canvassing/certifying; recounts, etc.
- Develop work flow diagrams for all aspects of the internal and external processes. Engage the staff in developing these diagrams. Allow staff to review the work flow diagrams from other divisions. This opportunity allows all staff members to understand how their work impacts the entire organization's mission.
 - *Tip: Look for duplication of work processes and encourage staff to identify ways to work more efficiently.*
 - Review Federal and State records retention laws for election-related materials. If the jurisdiction does not have a records retention schedule, consider establishing one for the elections office. Include each record series; type of record, i.e. inactive, permanent or archival; storage location; and date to be destroyed, if applicable.
 - *Tip: Follow the retention exactly (unless there is an ongoing legal dispute) and dispose of the documents and electronic media as outlined in law or in the jurisdiction's policies and procedures.*
 - Notwithstanding Federal and State laws on records retention for election materials, election officials should keep financial records relating to election administration for longer periods, if possible, to aid in documenting maintenance of effort (MOE) and for audit purposes.

Preparing for an Election

- Each election has a unique election calendar. The election calendar is similar to any project management timeline. Every election has a beginning date and an end date. Each critical event and task has a start and end date and is assigned to specific staff members. To provide for continuity of operations, alternate staff members might be assigned tasks as a back up to the staffer with primary responsibility
 - Some examples of events and tasks that might be included in an election calendar include the securing of polling places, proofing and printing ballots, mailing out absentee ballots, opening early voting locations, training poll workers, preparing and distributing supplies, conducting the canvass of votes and certifying the election.
- Many election tasks cannot be started until a preceding task is complete. These contingent tasks might be clearly noted in the election calendar.
 - *Tip: Assign a key staff member to monitor the calendar events. Be prepared to develop contingency plans in the event that a critical task falls behind schedule.*
- Some election officials use project management software or other types of software solutions to automate the election calendar. If a milestone date is missed, the software immediately notifies the division's supervisor. Some software provides email reminders to staff members and can provide the election official the ability to track the entire operation. Some versions of these types of project management tools may be available for free online.

- Key milestones may translate into a need for additional part-time employees. These employees are needed to perform data entry, answer the phones, manage incoming and outgoing absentee ballots, etc.
- Election project management becomes more intense during the weeks approaching the start of early voting and Election Day. Full-time staff members are often working long hours to accomplish required tasks. Statistical data are used on a daily basis to monitor workflow, to review the number of absentee and early voters, and to respond to staff and voter needs.
- Disaster and continuity planning tools and procedures should be in place at all times. Election officials can be prepared to respond to conceivable emergency scenarios (i.e. shortage of ballots; polling places that are locked on Election morning; poll workers who fail to arrive on time; power failures; road closures; and, sudden changes in weather conditions, etc.)
 - For additional information and suggestions see chapter 11 of the Election Management Guidelines, *Contingency Planning and Change Management*.

Facilities and Equipment Management

- Election officials are responsible for the facilities that house their operations. This responsibility may include contracting for janitorial services, providing for security of the buildings, employees, and equipment, managing utilities and continuity of operations.
- Tracking of equipment and supplies is often managed by barcode scanning or other types of technology. An automated inventory management software system can reduce labor costs and errors. This software can track voting equipment, alert to needed repairs, and maintain a history on each piece of voting equipment.
- Consider developing diagrams of the elections office and external locations under the election official's control, detailing the location of all equipment and material. Document where security is in place to protect voting equipment and ballots (voted and unvoted). Indicate which areas of the building are climate-controlled to address equipment requirements.
 - The diagrams might include the rooms in various staging configurations involved in managing an election. Many election offices use the same space for different purposes, depending upon the need at a given stage in the election cycle. Include this information in elections office processes. *Example: Poll worker training areas are set up during designated times. Indicate those locations and their setup requirements within the facility management operational procedures.*
 - Review the diagrams after each election cycle to make modifications, as needed. It is helpful to diagram the following:
 - Early voting locations – setup of equipment, laptops, check-in areas, voter staging areas, secure voting area, entrance and exit, location of all signs, etc.

- Poll worker supply check out and election night check in areas.
 - Staging area for recounts, canvassing, research or provisional ballots, etc., including the work flow diagram for each task.
 - Outgoing and incoming mail ballot processing areas.
 - Each polling place within the jurisdiction – create a diagram for each location indicating where to set up the voter check-in tables and voting equipment.
- Consider preparing a manual describing all technology-related activities within the elections office. Document serial numbers and life cycles for all computers and equipment; indicate where the servers are located; and detail all back-up and continuity of operations plans. Include information on maintenance requirements for all equipment, from printers and copy machines to telephones and computerized voting equipment. (*See Contingency Planning and Change Management chapter for more information.*)

Staffing

- Several States mandate bipartisan election offices (Democratic and Republican election directors and full-time staff members). Some election offices are managed by Election Boards appointed by the State. In other jurisdictions, the county manager hires and supervises the election director. Still many other election officials are elected to their jobs.
- Some election officials have complete control over hiring, while others must follow existing county hiring practices.
- On Election Day, the local elections office often becomes the largest governmental department in the jurisdiction. There will be part-time employees and many poll workers to recruit, train, and manage.
 - Some election officials use “temp” agencies to effectively manage their resources. Also, if the elections office can use the same temporary employees repeatedly, it may save on the cost of training.
- Encourage staff to learn all aspects of managing an election. Provide ongoing training opportunities and cross train all staff members. Empower employees to propose creative solutions and provide time for each employee to innovate new solutions.
- Create and establish individual functional statements for each position. It is recommended that each functional statement be signed by the employee and his or her supervisor. *Note: A Functional Statement is similar to a job description; however, it provides a detailed listing of specific job duties for the position.*
- Develop an office organizational chart and distribute it to all employees. Ensure that all employees understand the chain of command for their positions. Since promotional opportunities are often limited in an election office, encourage employees to learn other tasks and responsibilities so that they can increase their skill sets and knowledge, and eventually broaden their job descriptions.

- Bring the staff together as a team to develop a Mission Statement for the elections office and a listing of staff competencies and core values.
 - “Seek better ways to provide services to encourage all eligible residents to exercise their right to vote. Conduct elections in a fair, accurate and efficient manner. Maintain a continuous professional level of service to the public. Develop new techniques to improve outreach services that acknowledge the diversity of Alameda County.” Source, Alameda County, California Registrar of Voters, Mission Statement
 - “Serving the public by administering the election process and promoting voter participation.” Source: Johnson County, Kansas Election Office, Mission Statement
 - Examples of staff competencies: Integrity, Honesty, and Impartiality; Teamwork and Cooperation; Reliability and Commitment; Attention to Detail and Responsibility; Flexibility; Stress Tolerance and Stamina; Change and Create; Communications and Public Relations; Election Management.
 - Examples of core values: Open Communication, Honest Feedback, Challenging the Process, Commitment to Team Work, Delegation, Customer Focus, and Recognition.
- Develop partnerships with area community colleges and high schools for recruitment and training of poll workers. *Example: Guilford County, North Carolina has developed a poll worker certification training program in conjunction with an area community college.*
- *Review the EAC’s Successful Practices for Recruitment, Training, and Retention of Poll Workers and College Poll Workers and the EMG chapter on Building Community Partnerships for additional ideas on how to manage this critical task.*
- Consider implementing flexible hours for temporary employees.
 - *Tip: Stay at home mothers and fathers could come to work after the children are in school and leave early to pick their children up after school.*

Budgeting, Collection of Statistical Data, and Performance Management:

- Many election officials view their budgets as based on a four year election cycle. Simply, elections for almost all offices happen at least once (regularly) in that period. While most agency budgets are compared year-to-year, election officials stress the importance of comparing similar election years. For example, the budget for a Presidential election year should be compared to the previous Presidential election year.
- Election offices can be prepared to conduct special elections with very little advance notice. These elections are either funded from the election office operating budget or by charging the jurisdiction in which the election is being contested. Examples of costs that the local elections office might be able to bill

include labor, printing, polling place rental, supplies, publication costs, computer usage, vehicle usage, and indirect/overhead costs.

- There are many factors that affect the preparation of a budget. These factors include the number of elections, number of voters involved, length of ballot, number of ballot types or styles, number of polling locations, number of poll workers, type(s) of equipment used, amount of overtime and extra help needed, etc. Additionally, many jurisdictions have statutory requirements about how many ballots they must print for an election or how many early voting centers they must open.
- Statistics and metrics can be important for planning, budgeting, and reporting requirements. They provide the ability for election offices to quantify the quality of service provided, evaluate internal accountability, and clarify long term goals and objectives. Computer systems and software provide an easy way to collect statistics.
- Performance measures might be easy to understand and should only evaluate what is important.
 - *Tip: Consider publishing the performance measures in budget requests, media packets and annual reports.*
- Use statistics to determine costs, i.e. cost per vote cast, cost per polling place, cost per absentee/mail ballot voter, poll worker recruitment and training costs. Statistics from past elections might be used to develop pre-election plans for future elections, i.e. projections for ballot orders, number of poll workers, number of polling places, number of voting machines, voter registration, early voting and Election Day voters, etc. Statistics can also be used to plan for staffing needs and to track staff productivity.

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The EAC is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). It is charged with administering payments to states and developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, implementing election administration improvements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, accrediting voting system test laboratories and certifying voting equipment and serving as a national clearinghouse and resource of information regarding election administration.