

Electoral Board and General Registrar

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► Agency Mission

To provide each citizen of Fairfax County with the opportunity to exercise his or her right to vote in an efficient and equitable manner in accordance with the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Code of Virginia.

► Trends/Issues

The 2000 presidential election has focused unprecedented attention on the conduct of elections and the voter registration process throughout the nation. Numerous studies have been and are being conducted to evaluate every aspect of the election process from voting equipment standards to election officer training, voter registration procedures and accessibility issues. Undoubtedly, new legislation will be introduced on both the Federal and State levels to “fix” many of the problems that were raised in these studies. Unfortunately, study recommendations and subsequent legislation, however well-intentioned, don’t always address the cost and logistics of implementing the changes.

Even before the events in Florida, the Electoral Board was seeking to purchase new electronic voting machines. Although our Electronic-1242 machines are extremely reliable and well-liked by the voters, they are getting old and becoming quite expensive to maintain, store and transport. The DOS-based software is fifteen years old – quite ancient by today’s technology standards. The Agency has been examining new equipment from several vendors who are going through the state certification process. The new touch-screen type machines are smaller, requiring less warehouse storage space and less cost to transport. The testing, set-up and annual maintenance will require significantly less time. New machines have the capability of transmitting results electronically with virtually simultaneous display on the Internet. In addition, federal legislation is now pending that will require all precincts to have voting equipment that allows visually impaired voters to cast their ballots without assistance. All of the new machines that are under consideration will be able to meet that standard. Funding is now in place to begin a five-year machine replacement program beginning in FY 2002.

A major concern brought by the aftermath of the 2000 election was the question of voter eligibility. The Registrar’s Office serves the citizens of Fairfax County by providing registration opportunities for all eligible citizens who desire to vote, and assures their franchise through the maintenance of complete and accurate records. The implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) was, and continues to be, the watershed event that has affected the overall work volume. The number of voter registration applications that must be processed has doubled and the complexity of the process has also grown in magnitude. The number of applications that require significant amounts of research can be illustrated by the increase in denial letters. Before NVRA less than 1 percent of the application volume required a denial. Since NVRA an average of 12 percent of applications are being denied. Historically, part-time staffing was always used to help with peak-time work. Now, however, part-time employees are needed to keep up with day-to-day requirements. At the FY 2001 Carryover Review, 4 part-time positions were converted to 2 full-time positions to help meet increased work requirements.

Expansions of duties have also come from other sources besides legislation. The Registrar’s Office is now responsible for managing the election night return of results and materials from all of the County’s precincts. This increases the burden on staff hours from 5:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. on the day of the election. Another challenge that this division now faces is the

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FY 2002 implementation of the new State online information system. Hopefully, this system will help the staff process applications more quickly and improve the overall quality of the information. Time will provide that information; however, the transition period will undoubtedly provide the usual challenges of implementing a new system and a reduction in efficiency can be expected until the staff is fully trained.

Several other issues that were also apparent from last year's election included the need to recruit and train competent officers of election and the need to expand voter education. The Agency is actively recruiting citizens to serve as officers of election by working with the political parties and community associations. We are seeking to develop partnerships with businesses, other agencies and non-profit associations to increase the number of citizens who are available to serve on Election Day. The Agency is also looking into more innovative ways of training such as more user-friendly instruction materials, simplified forms, training videos and possible online instruction to ensure more consistent and accessible training for poll workers. A new program was started in 2000 to use high school seniors as Election Pages to assist the officers of election in the polling places. The pilot program, which included disability awareness training, was quite successful and will be expanded this year.

Increased voter education, although not mandated, will certainly go a long way toward preventing many of the problems associated with the 2000 election. The Agency is already conducting voter registration at all public high schools, many shopping centers and Metro stations in the area. A series of Public Service Announcements is being developed with the assistance of Channel 16 to inform voters of registration deadlines and requirements, remind voters to update their records if they have moved, advertise the availability of absentee voting satellites and demonstrate the use of the voting machines. The Agency Web site is being enhanced to include more information for voters and will include graphics and instructions on using the voting equipment. Absentee ballot applications, Voter Registration Forms, Election Officer Applications and information brochures are sent to all libraries, governmental centers and other public service agencies. We are exploring the possibility of providing instructions on registering to vote and using the voting machines in other languages. The Agency is also examining ways to reach out to the citizens with disabilities to provide assistance and information to voters in alternative formats.

One additional responsibility for our Agency that is unrelated to the 2000 election, is the new requirements concerning campaign contributions and expenditure reporting. The new mandate requires the Agency to "receive, catalog and review" the reports filed by candidates (Section 24.2-928.) The Agency now has the authority to impose and collect fines for violations of campaign reporting requirements (Section 24.2-929 and 930.) Under State Board of Election guidelines, the review process involves checking balances, verifying aggregate totals for contributors, verifying beginning and ending balances with previous reports, and checking the final disposition of loan balances and transfers of funds to new campaigns. The audit and tracking of these reports and violations will be a huge undertaking and a new database is being developed for this purpose. In an election year, up to eight reports are filed for approximately 150 campaigns. In a non-election year, two reports are required for each open campaign.

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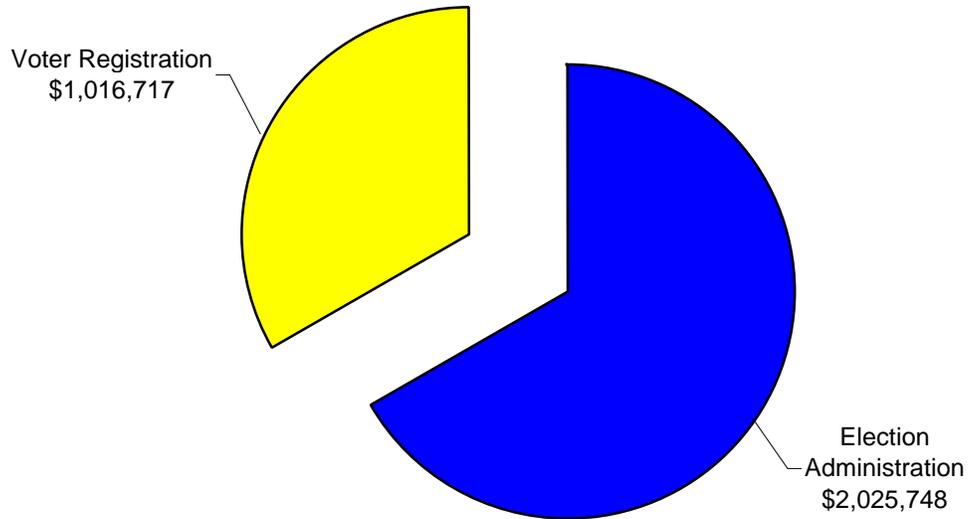
We expect that the next few years will bring some changes and provide a number of challenges for Federal and State legislators. Hearings regarding DMV procedures, absentee voting, voting equipment, education of voters and many other facets of voter registration and elections are currently ongoing in the General Assembly and will, in all likelihood, result in new legislation. The use of technology will most certainly be a primary factor to be considered in any change in voting or registration procedures. Security, equity, identity and privacy issues continue to be a concern with any form of Internet voting or online registration technology. We expect that the Federal and State legislators will have difficulty in balancing the time-honored traditions of neighborhood polling places, grassroots campaigns, local registrars and traditional balloting with the demands for speed, accuracy and convenience in the high-tech community. The biggest challenge for this Agency will be to implement new mandates while continuing to maintain the voters' confidence in the system.

► Summary of All Agency CAPS

CAPS Number	CAPS Title	CAPS Net Cost	CAPS Number of Positions/SYE
15-01	Election Administration	\$2,004,277	9/9
15-02	Voter Registration	\$938,476	13/13
TOTAL Agency		\$2,942,753	22/22

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Total FY 2002 Adopted Budget Expenditures = \$3,042,465

Total FY 2002 Adopted Budget Net Cost = \$2,942,753