

Lines of Business

LOB #44:

ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Purpose

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.

Description

The Election Management Division of the Office of Elections is responsible for the logistics of conducting elections by providing the security, ballots, election supplies, polling places, officers of election and training to conduct all federal, state, town and local elections in Fairfax County.

Due to the cyclical nature of Election Management responsibilities, the department operates with a small year-round staff and relies on a large number of limited term employees to assist with election preparation including testing voting equipment and preparing supplies, and recruiting, and assigning and training officers of election. Limited term employees also staff the absentee voting satellites and assist with the processing, mailing and counting of absentee ballots. Additionally, approximately 2,500 citizen “volunteers” are recruited and trained to serve in polling places in an average year. This number increases to approximately 3,500 in a presidential election year.

The Election Management Division also works closely with the Voter Registration Division and Fairfax County Attorney’s Office to ensure compliance with all federal, state and local laws.

The Election Management Division also coordinates efforts with numerous other County agencies during the year to ensure the security and efficiency of each election. These agencies include, among others, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Sheriff, Police, Emergency Management, Information Technology, Human Resources, Public Affairs, County Attorney, Document Services, Cable, Facilities Management, Management and Budget, Park Authority and Libraries.

Voting System

In November 2014, the Office of Elections successfully implemented a new digital scan voting system to replace its aging optical scanners and touch screen voting machines. All voters now mark a paper ballot to cast their vote which creates and preserves a “paper trail” for any potential audits or recounts. The new voting equipment utilizes digital scanners which scan and capture an image of each paper ballot cast. The scanners are supplemented by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible ballot marking devices which employ audio and touch screen interfaces to print a barcoded ballot that can be read and counted by the digital scanners.

Paper Ballots

Paper ballots must be approved and printed in a manner prescribed by the Virginia Department of Elections. All ballots must be strictly secured and accounted for before, during and after each election. Each election requires different numbers and types of ballots depending upon the anticipated voter turnout and the offices for which candidates are being elected. For example, in November 2015, the department created 76 ballot styles to conduct elections for the multiple legislative and supervisor districts across the County. Additionally, based on the language accessibility requirements of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, the County is required to produce all ballots and election materials in both English and Spanish.

Office of Elections

Absentee Voting

The Office of Elections must have ballots available for mailing and in-person absentee voting a minimum of 45 days before each election. As a service to voters, the Office of Elections also maintains seven absentee voting satellites at various locations around the County. This is in addition to hours offered on Monday – Friday. It is important to note that an eighth site will be added in 2016. In addition to facilitating in-person absentee voting, these satellites also provide an opportunity for voters without identification to obtain a free photo ID.

Election Materials

The Election Management Division designs, produces, and ensures the security of a multitude of forms, signs, instructions and supplies to conduct each election. This includes everything from legal documents (such as the Statement of Results and Election Abstracts) to such items as signs, pens and calculators. Although the Virginia Department of Elections prescribes the format for many of the legal forms, staff must still customize these items to merge with precinct and candidate databases for greater efficiency.

Precincts and Polling Places

The Office of Elections makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for changes in precinct boundaries and polling places based on election districts, population growth, suitability of facilities and ADA compliance. In areas where school and County facilities are not available, the Office negotiates the use of private buildings such as churches and community centers to ensure voters have a polling place that is convenient and accessible in their communities. Since 1990, the number of precincts in Fairfax County has increased from 170 to 242 (as of December 2015.) Additional precincts may be added as the population increases.

Officers of Election:

Typically approximately 2,500 election officers are needed to staff the County's polling places for a November general election. While this number suffices for a "typical" election, the Office of Elections projects November 2016 presidential election is projected to require approximately 3,500 election officers. This projection is supported by the County's Bi-Partisan Election Improvement Commission which recommended higher staffing levels to facilitate an increased number of electronic poll book check-in stations in the precincts. Additionally, the Office of Elections will manage a higher number of satellite voting locations prior to the election and the Central Absentee Precinct will require significantly more officers to ensure timely and accurate processing of the expected increase in requests for absentee ballots.

Election officer recruiting remains a challenge and an ongoing effort. While many election officers serve multiple years, there is natural attrition in this transient county. In order to communicate with existing election officers and potential election officers, the Office has streamlined communication methods with automated e-mail notifications and enhanced outreach efforts.

Election Officer Training

All Chief, Assistant Chief and new Election Officers must take mandatory training before each election. In addition, Code of Virginia requires all Election Officers to be trained at least once every four years or whenever new equipment is implemented. Training large numbers of Officers in the short period of time before Election Day presents enormous challenges. The Office continues to explore innovative methods for delivering training including online interactive training and videos.

Benefits

The success of the democratic process requires fair and open elections that accurately reflect the will of the electorate. The Election Management LOB provides eligible voters of Fairfax County with a voice in government by providing the opportunity to vote in a convenient and accessible location, voting capability for those voters who are unable to go to their polling place on Election Day, and the assurance that every vote will be counted.

Office of Elections

Mandates

Elections are mandated by the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia and are conducted as outlined in Virginia Code Title 24.2, the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986, and the Help America Vote Act of 2003.

Trends and Challenges

Since the presidential election of 2000, the conduct of elections has received increased scrutiny from federal, state and local government agencies and officials, the news media and the general public. Each year, new legislation has been introduced to expand voting opportunities, regulate voting equipment and to change many of the traditional voting methods and procedures. Special interest groups, news outlets, academic researchers, and numerous other organizations have begun using the Internet and social media to express their opinions on the conduct of elections. It is one of the Office's most important objectives to overcome misconceptions and maintain voter confidence in the integrity of Fairfax County elections.

The events of September 11, 2001, followed by threats to the election process in Spain and elsewhere, have created a need for enhanced security measures to ensure the safety of Fairfax County polling places, personnel and equipment. A significant portion of election planning is now devoted to security and emergency contingency resources. Unlike elections conducted 20 years ago, police, emergency management personnel and technology experts have become an integral part of today's election planning.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #44: Election Management			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$1,312,834	\$1,391,658	\$1,567,844
Operating Expenses	411,656	315,920	468,465
Capital Equipment	7,670	0	0
Total Expenditures	\$1,732,160	\$1,707,578	\$2,036,309
General Fund Revenue	\$16,952	\$16,413	\$16,763
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$1,715,208	\$1,691,165	\$2,019,546
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	7/7	7/7	7/7
Total Positions	7/7	7/7	7/7

Office of Elections

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Machines/precinct	4.10	3.01	3.34	3.50	3.97
Election officers	2,984	2,320	2,593	2,400	3,500
Cost of officers/precinct	\$1,409	\$1,806	\$2,007	\$1,843	\$2,631
Cost per poll voter	\$1.42	\$2.54	\$2.76	\$3.20	\$2.33
Percent voter turnout	80.5%	46.8%	45.7%	37.7%	80.0%
Officers/precinct	12.59	9.75	10.89	9.96	14.46

The objective of the Elections Management Division is to improve the voting experience by providing a sufficient number of voting machines for each precinct (a minimum of 1 digital ballot scanning machine and 2 ADA accessible ballot marking devices) that provide a voter verifiable paper ballot and comply with legal mandates. Additional machines are required for presidential elections as reflected in the FY 2017 estimate. Election management is cyclical in nature in that election cycles and voter turnout vary significantly depending on a variety of factors. Presidential elections tend to see voter turnout in Fairfax County in the 80 percent range, while off-year elections usually experience turnout of approximately 40 percent. In addition, it is difficult to estimate how many elections will be held in a year, due to the unpredictable nature of party primaries, special elections, etc.

The cost of election officers per precinct rose in FY 2014 and FY 2015 as the Electoral Board voted to increase election officer compensation for the first time for chiefs/assistant chiefs since 2006 and for election officers since 1998. Efficiencies created by the recently purchased election equipment will result in fewer election officers being required than with the hybrid election system that was fully replaced in FY 2016. The efficiencies created by the new system will reduce the impact of the increased compensation and the increased number of officers required in anticipated high turnout elections, such as the presidential election in FY 2017.