May 2025 General Registrar's Report
Attachment A: Awards and Recognitions

Outstanding Performance Awards

On Friday, May 2, 2025, ten staff members from the Office of Elections received Outstanding Performance Awards (OPAs) during an employee awards ceremony at the Fairfax County Government Center. County Executive Bryan Hill and Human Resources Director Linnaea Jablonski presented the awards.

Per county guidelines, OPAs recognize employees who perform their duties in an outstanding manner and whose work consistently exceeds expectations. Awards may be granted for sustained high performance, significant contributions to county operations, or exemplary work on a specific project or assignment. Each award includes a certificate of commendation, a $300 bonus, and one day of administrative leave.

Our staff were recognized under the category of *Effective and Efficient Government*, one of the main community outcome areas in the countywide strategic plan. Excerpts from the awards program booklet summarizing each individual's accomplishments are included below:

- **Bushra Ardalan, Voter Services & SDR Manager**
  "For the 2024 presidential election, Voter Services Manager Bushra Ardalan demonstrated exceptional leadership by guiding her 50-person team to efficiently process a record number of voter registration transactions, absentee ballot applications, address changes, same-day registrations, and provisional ballots—all while meeting stringent state-mandated deadlines. Her professionalism, commitment to excellence, and unwavering dedication ensured that all qualified Fairfax County citizens had the opportunity to participate in the democratic process."

- **Sean Stewart, Communications Specialist and previously Absentee Mail Manager**
  "To ensure the success of absentee by mail and provisional voting for the presidential election, Sean worked against state-mandated deadlines on many fronts in a highly demanding environment, managing many, often concurrent operations. He did this cheerfully, competently, and with the upmost professionalism."

- **Jerald Taylor, Absentee Mail Team Member**
  "Jerald was nominated for an outstanding performance award for his overall Absentee Ballot division support, staff leadership, and individual project efforts during the November 2024 Presidential election. In each assigned function and voluntarily accepted task, Jerald went the extra mile for his colleagues and Fairfax County absentee voters."

- **Florence Brown, Early Voting Manager**
  William "Bill" Turley, Early Voting Assistant Manager
  "Florence and Bill led Fairfax County's record-breaking early voting program, serving 239,344 voters across 16 locations. They improved efficiency, reduced wait times, optimized layouts, and managed crises, including major power outages. Their leadership, problem-solving, and innovations set a new standard for election administration, ensuring a smooth voting experience."

- **Gretchen Coleman, Election Officer Manager**
  Sean Rogers, Training & Operations Manager
  Jean Thoensen, Training & Operations Specialist
  "For the November 2024 election, Gretchen, Sean, and Jean tackled major challenges head-on, improving training, security, and efficiency. Their innovations reduced provisional ballot errors, optimized election officer support, and streamlined processes. Their work directly improved election operations, making procedures more accurate, efficient, and resilient for future elections."

- **Judith "Judy" Clardy, Voting Equipment & Logistics Assistant Manager**
  Mark Beale, Voting Equipment & Logistics Team Member
  "Mark and Judy were instrumental in implementing and maintaining our new RFID tracking system, ensuring accurate equipment and ballot tracking across 16 early voting sites and 231 polling places. They also led voting equipment testing and managed deliveries, strengthening election security, efficiency, and accountability in a high-stakes presidential election."

U.S. Election Assistance Commission Clearinghouse Awards

Each year, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the federal agency that supports elections nationwide, announces its Clearinghouse Awards ("Clearies"). These prestigious awards recognize jurisdictions across the country for innovative practices that enhance the integrity, security, accessibility, and efficiency of elections. Last year, Fairfax County received an honorable mention award for our Election Officer Portal, created using innovative no-code tools.

This year, we are proud to share that the EAC recognized Fairfax County with five Clearies awards—the most of any locality nationwide—including two full awards and three honorable mention awards. This recognition underscores the significance of our office's ongoing efforts to improve election operations, enhance the voter experience, and support election officers through thoughtful, data-driven innovation. We are deeply gratified that the EAC has acknowledged our contributions at the national level. Just as we have benefited from the shared best practices of other jurisdictions in prior years, we are proud that our work may now serve as a model for others.

When EAC Commissioner Thomas Hicks called to notify us about the awards, he also expressed interest in visiting our office. We look forward to welcoming him in the near future, as his schedule permits.

Summaries of each recognized initiative, as published on the EAC website, are included below. Additional information is available on the EAC website: https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/eac-clearinghouse-award-winners-2024

Best Practices in Recruiting, Training, and Retaining Poll Workers

- **No More Waits, No Misplaced Tapes: Closing the Polls Faster on Election Night *(winner!)***
  Summary: "Poll workers often struggle with sequencing, leading to possible delays and confusion. To address this, Fairfax County created a Closing Procedures Workshop with two hands-on exercises. First, the Timeline Exercise uses 20 flashcards representing key closing tasks. Teams must sort these into categories based on who can complete them and the overall process, such as any poll worker, the chief poll worker, and the specific sequencing order of tasks. This exercise promotes teamwork and helps workers visualize the closing process, streamlining task delegation. Second, the Tapes Exercise tackles one of the most challenging aspects of closing: matching the DS200 ballot scanner tapes with the correct forms. Using laminated tape samples, poll workers practice identifying and attaching tapes to the appropriate documentation, eliminating guesswork during actual poll closing. By transforming complex procedures into engaging activities, this interactive training helped poll workers better understand their tasks and reduced closing times on Election Night."

Innovations or New Practices in Election Administration

- **Pollbook Unclear? No Need to Fear! A Worksheet Leads the Way for Processing Nonroutine Voters *(winner!)***
  Summary: "Election day moves fast, but nonroutine voters slow things down—especially after Virginia introduced same-day registration (SDR) in 2022. SDR voters cast provisional ballots, creating more confusion at polling places. In the moment, poll workers need clear, immediate guidance, not a complicated manual. That's why the staff developed a nonroutine voter worksheet. This is a simple step-by-step tool that eliminates guesswork and gives poll workers confidence in tricky situations. The office provided 100 to 500 copies of the form to each polling place and required poll workers to complete it for each nonroutine voter. At first, some poll workers were hesitant to fill out yet another form. But once they tried it and saw how it simplified their process, many said they wouldn't want to work without it."

- **The Best of Both Worlds: A Digital Helper for Paper Forms *(honorable mention award)***
  Summary: "The Fairfax County Office of Elections addressed how to help poll workers complete a complex, math-heavy form at the end of a 16-hour day. In Virginia, poll

workers must complete a Statement of Results (SOR), a complex form that requires recording numbers from many sources and doing lots of math to account for every ballot. Mistakes are common, especially with manual calculations. The Fairfax County Office of Elections created two tools to make this form easier: The Closing Numbers Worksheet, which is comprised of a simple form where poll workers record all required numbers in one place, eliminating the need to pass multiple forms around. Also, the SOR Helper was developed to serve as an online form preloaded on each precinct's iPad that the Chief uses to input those numbers. The Fairfax County Office of Elections used a free online tool called Fillout. This tool calculates and exports everything into a digital PDF that looks exactly like the paper SOR form, making it easy for poll workers to copy onto their official paperwork. With these tools, poll workers no longer scramble to track down numbers or second-guess their math. This resulted in fewer mistakes, a smoother closing, and much less stress at the end of election day."

- **Overlay It! The Simple Solution That Ensures Every Provisional Vote Can Count** ***(honorable mention award)***
  Summary: "In Virginia, provisional voters must complete multiple fields on a complicated and busy provisional envelope, with seven required fields interspersed between many optional ones. Failure to complete any required field invalidates the entire envelope, preventing the ballot from being counted. This common human error creates an avoidable barrier to voting, leading to voter frustration and an administrative burden on election officials. To address these mistakes, the Fairfax County Office of Elections developed plastic overlays that match the envelopes with cutouts over only the required fields. By placing the overlay on top of the envelope, missing fields are immediately visible, allowing voters to correct errors before submission. This simple tool allows poll workers to instantly verify whether a voter has completed all necessary fields. The Fairfax County Office of Elections worked with a local print vendor to design and manufacture these overlays from durable polystyrene plastic, with each overlay being precisely die-cut. This makes for an easy-to-use product that can be reused in each election. This low-cost solution has already led to significantly higher envelope completion rates, reduced administrative workload, and greater voter confidence in the provisional voting process."

Exemplary Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Efforts

- **Empowering Poll Workers with Clear, Accessible Evacuation Guides** ***(honorable mention award)***
  Summary: "Effective emergency response requires quick, decisive action, but unfortunately, humans' first instinct is generally to freeze instead. This may be especially true for poll workers who work only one or two days a year and have limited opportunities to prepare. Although Fairfax County poll workers are trained in emergency procedures before election day, the Office of Elections recognized that they have limited capacity to retain complex guidance for unlikely situations. To address this, they created "evacuation guides" for every poll worker on election day. These one-page

handouts provided clear instructions for each poll worker to follow in the event of a precinct evacuation. Notably, the guides were tailored to each station in the polling place (greeter, check-in, ballot table, and so on), allowing the Fairfax County Office of Elections to distill the instructions to only the pertinent steps for each role that involved only the materials directly in front of them. The guides were printed on the back side of the station-specific handouts that poll workers were already using throughout the day."