



KING COUNTY
CITIZENS' ELECTION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

REPORT ON KING COUNTY ELECTIONS

March 2006

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to

John E. Davidson

John Davidson was a highly valued member of the Citizens' Election Oversight Committee who died in December 2005. His solid expertise and good nature played an important role in the committee's work. He also made valuable contributions to elections in general through his many years of service as an election observer.

His participation resulted in good working bipartisan relations that created quality collaborative efforts focused on a single shared goal:

Well-run elections for the citizens of King County.

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2006 REPORT TO THE KING COUNTY COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

On April 25, 2005 the Metropolitan King County Council unanimously approved Ordinance 15157, which reestablished the King County Citizens' Election Oversight Committee (CEOC) in response to serious problems that occurred in the 2004 General Election.

The County Council had established the first Citizens' Election Oversight Committee in February 2003 following significant problems in the conduct of elections in 2002 and 2003. Other significant examinations of the County elections process have been conducted, including the County Executive's Independent Task Force on Elections and an audit of the Elections Section commissioned by the Council and conducted by the Elections Center.

The CEOC has 13 members and was charged by the Council with identifying the cause of and solutions for 10 specific mistakes made in the 2004 General Election. The Council directed the CEOC to observe the 2005 Primary and General Elections and to recommend measures that would improve the conduct of elections to help restore voter confidence.

The CEOC established a mission and goals statement, as well as a charter (See Appendix). It elected a chair, AJ Culver, and vice chair, Randy Matheson, and met twice monthly or more since May 2005. All its meetings were open to the public. CEOC members interviewed Elections management and staff (including seasonal employees) and personally observed every step of the elections process in both the primary and general elections. The Committee's report represents a very high level of agreement among CEOC members, who represent a broad spectrum of political perspectives and career backgrounds.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2006 Citizens' Election Oversight Committee

"The mission of the committee is to help King County restore and maintain public confidence in elections." (Ordinance 15157)

Through observations, discussions, regular and special meetings, and the recommendations in this report, the CEOC believes it has achieved its mission.

Task: Identify the root cause of problems experienced during the 2004 general election the 2005 spring special election; recommend corrective actions.

An entire section of this report "Recent Election Problems" addresses this subject. The CEOC found that many problems have been fixed, but additional important improvements are still needed.

Task: Observe the 2005 Primary and General Elections, note any problems and make recommendations for improvements.

The CEOC observed every step in the primary and general elections from the printing of ballots, to training of seasonal employees, to distributing of poll ballots and materials, poll sites, absentee ballot processing, canvassing, Canvass Board meetings, challenges and certification. The conduct of the 2005 Primary Election improved over the 2004 General Election and additional progress was demonstrated for the 2005 General Election. This report notes areas that still need improvement.

Task: Help identify the resources required to run accurate, open and fair elections.

The CEOC approached this task by evaluating staffing requirements and facilities needs to conduct well-run elections. It found that there appears to be sufficient staff budgeted to conduct accurate, open and fair elections. However, there is an unsettling level of vacancies and staff turnover that makes Elections operations vulnerable to human errors. Regarding facilities, it is essential that the County consolidate elections operations into one building as soon as possible. Both of these issues have expanded discussions later in the report.

Task: Make any additional recommendations for improving the election process and elevating public confidence.

Highest Priority Recommendations

Consolidate Facilities: This is the highest priority recommendation of the Oversight Committee. Security, management, communications and control, fewer opportunities for human error, employee morale and motivation, costs, and the ability to train and manage a large seasonal workforce in a favorable environment are some of the most important reasons to establish this facility.

Move to All-Mail Elections: Running two separate elections processes (poll voting and mail voting) increases the likelihood of breaches in security and of human errors. As the public holds the Elections Section more accountable, there is a related responsibility to simplify the inherently complex election process. Already over 70 percent of voters have chosen to cast their ballots by mail. Keys to achieving excellent all-mail elections are adequate facilities, accurate voter registration records, good technology, trained staff and regional voting centers. This must be combined with effective processes for ballot verification, election canvassing and reconciliation procedures to ensure the full accounting of all ballots issued, accepted, rejected and counted.

Management of Elections: The CEOC recommends that the Records, Elections and Licensing Services Division (REALS) Director contract with a consultant to help shape the organization into a cohesive, high performance unit. No other group of public employees is under such great scrutiny. Management and employees must live with the public expectation of 100 percent accuracy and zero tolerance for mistakes. The pressure of being observed while performing each and every procedure requires special skills at all management levels. The CEOC recommends against bringing in a "turnaround team" with direct responsibility for managing elections. Taking such an action would seriously undermine management. It also appears to be in conflict with state law, which for King County assigns the authorities and responsibilities of running elections to the REALS Director. In addition there may be a conflict with County code which requires the Executive to appoint and the Council to confirm the top elections official. Separately, the Director would benefit from hiring a consultant to help implement best practices. This will be very important if the County moves to all-mail elections.

Improve Voter Registration: A number of problems continue to surface in this area. Errors in voter registration records are a significant threat to building and maintaining public confidence. The County cannot relax and simply rely on the state database. The Elections Section must take a proactive, educational and cooperative stance in removing the voter records of felons, the deceased, dual registrations and registrations from illegal addresses, and upholding the voting rights of every eligible citizen.

Improve Election Security: The CEOC strongly believes that effective and verifiable security for all aspects of the elections process is essential to ensuring that "All elections shall be free and equal" as required by the state constitution. The Elections Section has devoted considerable effort to improving security, but more must be done in the areas of physical security, electronic security, ballot reconciliation, election observation, training and planning. Consolidation of election facilities, along with all-mail elections, will reduce the potential for fraud and error. The CEOC recommends developing a comprehensive, well-documented election security plan in close consultation with security and computer professionals, election observers and critics, the Secretary of State and other election administrators.

Elect the County Auditor: Restoring public confidence in the County's elections process requires consistently excellent performance and increased accountability to the voters. King County is the only county in Washington where the chief elections officer is appointed rather than elected. The majority of the CEOC recommends making the Elections Director an elected, non-partisan office. The CEOC is unanimous in recommending that non-elections functions be transferred to other county agencies, to create a stand-alone elections operation focused on one critical task – conducting elections.

Other Recommendations: The CEOC makes additional recommendations on Elections:

- Business and Operations Plan
- Precinct Size
- Ballot Production and Handling
- Primary Election Date and Primary Certification Date
- Media Communications Plan
- Polling Places
- Federal HAVA Disability Requirements

Task: Additional CEOC Work

Were the recommendations of the 2004 CEOC implemented?

While not required in the enabling legislation, the CEOC felt it was important to determine the extent to which previous recommendations have been implemented. The CEOC found that the Executive, the Council, the REALS Director and Elections Section staff have acted and continue to act in good faith to implement the May 2004 CEOC recommendations. Many suggested changes (for example, improved poll worker training and recruitment) were in place or in process in 2004.

More changes (such as improved processing of provisional ballots and better documentation of election procedures) were achieved during 2005. Other key recommendations (improved space planning and facility acquisition to consolidate election facilities) are currently in process.

Looking forward, the February 2006 CEOC recommendations depend on the shared responsibility of the Council, the Executive, the REALS Director, Elections Section staff and King County voters to sustain positive momentum for ongoing reform, continuous improvements, accountability and reporting on performance. This cannot help but result in accurate, fair and transparent elections.

Continue the Citizens' Election Oversight Committee Function

Ordinance 15157 directed the CEOC to recommend whether or not to continue the service of an oversight committee for elections. The majority of the committee felt that the County would benefit by continuing the committee, but meeting on a less frequent basis (perhaps quarterly) or to be available to respond to specific Council or Executive concerns. If an oversight committee continues to serve, its primary responsibilities should be to observe elections, oversee the implementation of recommendations and oversee other significant changes in elections such as facility consolidation or implementing all-mail elections.

2006 RECOMMENDATIONS

RECENT ELECTION PROBLEMS

Issue

The legislation that established the CEOC directed the committee to investigate the causes of specific problems that occurred in the 2004 General Election and Spring 2005 Special Election and to make recommendations that would help prevent their reoccurrence. The following problems were identified:

1. Provisional ballots being inserted into optical scanning machines at the polls.
2. Failure to follow established procedures in validating signatures on mail ballots.
3. The administration and timely mailing of overseas and military ballots.
4. Felons voting who were not eligible to vote.
5. Removal of deceased voters from voting rolls and reduction of the potential for individuals to cast ballots for deceased voters.
6. Failure to identify, open and count all mail ballots.
7. Ballot duplication and enhancement.
8. Accuracy of voter registration rolls to eliminate voters receiving duplicate ballots at the same address.
9. Assurance that the number of ballots cast equals the number of ballots issued at poll sites and for the overall election before certification of the election.
10. Assurance of ballot security.
11. Other emergent and significant problems that could impact the outcome of an election.

Findings / Observations

Based on close observation of the many processes that must be performed to prepare for, conduct, canvass and certify an election, the CEOC has concluded that the specific problems that occurred in the 2004 General Election were primarily the result of a number of systemic failures. In a few cases specific state laws or circumstances contributed to problems. These systemic failures and specific causes have been noted as well in the independent audit of elections commissioned by the Council. They include:

- Lack of training or inadequate training of both permanent and seasonal employees.

- General staff turnover and lack of seasoned lower- and mid-level managers.
- Lack of manuals or information cards that describe in detail particular elections processes that are readily accessible to employees.
- Problems maintaining an up-to-date, accurate voter registration database.
- Lack of individual accountability.
- Lack of systems to measure individual and group performance.
- Poor communications.
- Lack of staff resources.
- Operating out of multiple facilities.
- Operating with a very compressed schedule between the primary and the general elections.
- The limited amount of time provided for certification following an election.
- Lack of a state or county requirement to account for and reconcile all ballots and votes.

Discussion

Of the findings above, some have been addressed by the legislature, many by the County's executive branch and the Council and some remain unresolved.

On specific problems, the CEOC found:

1. *Provisional ballots being inserted into optical scanning machines at the polls* – Both the County and the state legislature have addressed this problem and it appears to be resolved.
2. *Failure to follow established procedures in validating signatures on mail ballots* – The CEOC observed that training has been significantly increased for both regular and seasonal employees. Management is aware of the need to retain lower- and mid-level managers who have gained experience through recent events. Both of these issues, if appropriately addressed, should reduce, but will not totally eliminate, human error.
3. *The administration and timely mailing of overseas and military ballots* – The primary cause of the difficulty in timely mailing of these ballots is the late primary date. Elsewhere in this document the CEOC recommends that the Council encourage the state legislature to move the primary to an earlier date.
4. *Felons voting who were not eligible to vote* – The CEOC found that the primary cause of this problem is that no single state or national database exists for determining who is or is not eligible to vote. Felons convicted in Washington will be more easily removed from the voter database when the state consolidates voting records from each county. A problem will still exist with felons voting who are from other states or who have federal convictions. Since the last election, many felons have been removed from the King County voter database.

5. *Removing deceased voters from voting rolls and reducing the potential for individuals to cast ballots for deceased voters* – The CEOC found that problems remain in cleaning up the voter database. Again, maintaining voter registration files will be made somewhat easier as the state develops the statewide voter database. Elsewhere in this report recommendations are made on this subject.
6. *Failure to identify, open and count all mail ballots* – This section of the report will discuss the problem of losing track of voted ballots, such as finding them in the bottom of Accuvote machines that had been at poll sites and in boxes in the security cages. The issue of counting all ballots will be addressed in section 9. The CEOC found that lost voted ballots was an example of one of the systemic failures from lack of training and documentation and requires the same solution as item 2. Human error must be and has been significantly reduced from the level experienced in the 2004 General Election but will never be totally eliminated. Nevertheless, 100 percent accuracy should be the goal.
7. *Ballot duplication and enhancement* – The state legislature has addressed this issue by making it illegal to enhance a ballot. It should be noted that while the elimination of this procedure appears to have enhanced voter confidence by preserving the original ballot, it has resulted in the need for significantly more staff time to duplicate all ballots that cannot be read by the Accuvote ballot counting machines. The CEOC observed that the duplication process went smoothly in the 2005 Primary and General Elections.
8. *Accuracy of voter registration rolls to eliminate voters receiving duplicate ballots at the same address* – While many improvements have been made to clean up the voter database, this remains a major/significant concern of the CEOC and recommendations on it are made elsewhere in this report.
9. *Assurance that the number of ballots cast equals the number of ballots issued at poll sites and for the overall election before certification of the election* – The state legislature has addressed this problem through new requirements for reconciliation. While the reconciliation process went fairly well during the general election, the CEOC expects and recommends continued improvements be made in accounting for all ballots and in vote reconciliation.
10. *Assurance of ballot security* – While ballot security has been enhanced in a number of ways, more work remains to be done. Please see the ballot security discussion and recommendations.
11. *Other emergent and significant problems that could impact the outcome of an election* – The CEOC found three issues of concern that fit into this general category.

The first specific issue that was not listed in the enabling legislation (although the County Executive and Council are addressing it in other legislation) was the lack of a consolidated elections facility. This is a significant problem that is addressed in the facilities discussion of this report.

The second issue is a new problem that has emerged due to the way election results are being reported. In an effort to be responsive and

accountable, the Elections Section now reports the results of all precincts separately, including provisional ballots cast. In larger precincts this is not normally a problem, but in smaller precincts or when the number of provisional ballots is small, the secrecy of the voter's ballot is compromised because the public can find out how an individual has voted. This problem can be easily remedied by the recommendation given by the committee.

The third issue that the CEOC raises for consideration is how best to achieve organizational excellence throughout the Elections Section. Much change has already occurred in how elections are conducted and canvassed. Even bigger changes could occur if the County moves to an all-mail election system and consolidates into a single facility. It is essential that the organization receive outside assistance in adapting to change, adopting continuous quality improvement processes, becoming proactive and attaining the high level of excellence that elections demand and the public expects. Elsewhere in this report the CEOC recommends hiring a consultant to help achieve these objectives.

Recommendations

Most of the recommendations relevant to the specific issues listed previously are addressed in other sections of this document. The remaining recommendations are as follows:

1. Develop and maintain high quality training for regular and seasonal employees.
2. Develop specific programs to enhance the skills and retention of competent employees throughout the organization.
3. Continue to implement systemic solutions to problems such as ballot reconciliation and voter database maintenance.

Expected Outcomes

Implementing these recommendations should result in fewer human errors due to better training and improved internal systems; enhanced productivity, communication and morale due in part to operating in a single facility; more accurate elections overall; and enhanced public confidence from making the elections process more accurate, transparent and easy to observe.

CONSOLIDATED FACILITIES

Issue

The County operates elections from five locations: two different floors in the administrative building; the East Fir Street warehouse (Election Distribution Center); the Mail Ballot Operation Satellite (MBOS) facility in south Seattle; and the Temporary Elections Administration (TEA) building at King County International Airport. In addition training of seasonal employees is conducted throughout the County in facilities that are rented or borrowed.

Findings / Observations

These dispersed locations have the following negative impacts on the election process:

- Increased likelihood of breach of security.
- Additional cost of armed deputies.
- Additional cost of providing security cameras and other monitoring devices.
- Cost in time, dollars and security risks by moving ballots between locations.
- Awkwardness of managing hundreds of seasonal workers.
- Less than adequate parking and alternate transportation to the four sites.
- Difficulty in covering and performing the political observer functions.
- Difficulty in developing teamwork with line management and other permanent staff.
- Slow communication channels.
- Lack of day-to-day interface between management personnel.
- Reduced public confidence from the appearance of being disorganized.
- Difficulty in securing long-term space that has state-of-the-art technology to assist in the essential task of training.

Discussion

The consolidation of election facilities has been recommended previously by the CEOC in 2004, by several other groups studying the situation and by this body prior to the 2005 election cycle. The delay in consolidation has allowed the requirements to be more accurately defined, but it has also demonstrated the shortcomings of the current dispersed configuration. It appears that in the future greater emphasis will be placed on vote-by-mail and satisfying HAVA

requirements. At this time the general requirements for space to replace the five individual locations include:

- General office space with the usual mix of private offices, cubicles, open areas and conference rooms.
- Production areas (similar to light manufacturing) that are open, can comfortably accommodate employees and observers and can readily be equipped with modern security devices.
- Warehouse area for receiving and storing ballots and other materials on a secure and permanent basis.
- A technologically modern, adequate permanent space for training regular and seasonal employees.
- A location with good road and transit access and adequate parking for staff, seasonal workers and observers. The Elections Section has limited interaction with the other units of the County; therefore the location of a consolidated facility need not be restricted to downtown Seattle.

Recommendations

The addition of the TEA building in the equation has improved the situation considerably. The Elections staff is to be commended for moving into the vacant space and successfully adapting it to absentee ballot processing.

1. Consideration should be given to securing external assistance in the development of a detailed layout of space to improve the election processes and ensure the highest level of security (electronic, physical and deputies).
2. Action should be taken immediately to define the overall facility requirements, acquire the space and make it fully operable prior to the Primary Election in 2007.
3. There should be a transition and consolidation plan.
4. It is important that the functions currently included in the Elections Distribution Center on East Fir Street also be included in the consolidated facility. The facility should also include permanent space and technology for training employees. If the County elects to move to all vote-by-mail, the current functions performed at the EDC will be reduced and the space needed to process absentee ballots will increase. This will need to be factored into space planning for a consolidated facility.

Expected Outcomes

Consolidated facilities should result in an Elections Section with increased esprit de corps, greater productivity, decreased likelihood of errors, higher security, better on site management and greatly elevated public confidence.

VOTE-BY-MAIL

Issue

Should King County establish all vote-by-mail elections?

Findings / Observations

- The Oregon legislature began experimenting with all-mail elections in 1981, but it was not until the electorate approved a citizen initiative in November 1998 that Oregon went to mandatory all-mail elections on a statewide basis.
- Thirty-four of Washington's 39 counties have decided to conduct their elections only by mail. In the next few years more counties in the state are expected to conduct elections this way.
- Once in place all-mail elections are popular. In King County, on average, about 70 percent of voters already vote by mail.
- All-mail voting allows Elections officials to focus staff time and resources on accurately conducting a single election process (all-mail) instead of two election processes (poll elections and mail ballots).
- Over the long run all-mail elections should help control costs and will definitely simplify the overall election process.

Discussion

The primary advantage of an all vote-by-mail system is to simplify the voting process, increasing accuracy in election outcomes and, in conjunction with improving the voter database, reducing opportunities for fraud. Elections staff would be able to focus on conducting one election process instead of two (all mail instead of poll voting and mail ballot processing). A limited number of regional centers would be maintained to allow walk-in voting or ballot drop off on Election Day.

Some logistics remain to be worked out regarding how regional voting centers would work. The challenges being addressed by the state and counties for regional centers are:

- Making the entire voting database available at each center so that all centers can serve any voter.
- Having all ballot styles available at each center.
- Maintaining safeguards so walk-in voters, who previously mailed in their ballots, do not accidentally or deliberately vote a second time.

Vote-by-mail eliminates much of the cost and complication of printing and distributing ballots and of setting up and staffing hundreds of neighborhood

polling stations. It also eliminates the need to distribute ballots and voting machine components to the homes of election workers days before the election.

All-mail voting would simplify the collection of cast ballots because they would all be returned by the U.S. Postal Service to the same King County elections facility. Ballot security would be enhanced for the same reason.

Accurate voter registration rolls are required to ensure that more than one mail-in ballot are not sent to the same voter and that ballots are not mailed to people who are not legally eligible to vote.

By keeping its poll system of voting to the present time, King County has had to purchase over 500 electronic voting machines and will have to train over one thousand employees to operate them to comply with federal HAVA requirements. Counties that moved quickly to all all-mail elections have avoided these new costs. As discussed in the following recommendations, the CEOC found that the County was not ready to move immediately to all-mail elections.

The CEOC recognizes that many citizens take great pride in exercising their civic duty to vote at community polling sites. Many people believe that voting with their neighbors is an important part of the larger democratic process. Even regional voting centers would not have the same intimate feel of neighborhood polling sites.

In 2004 the previous CEOC recommended that King County gradually move to all-mail elections. In 2005 the Elections Center audit recommended the County consider all vote-by-mail elections.

Recommendations

1. Establish all-mail elections in King County when the County has met certain conditions and demonstrated certain competencies. These include:
 - a) Improving the accuracy of voter records and enforcing voter registration laws to prevent voter fraud. In particular ensure that election officials do not accept registrations where the place of residence is listed as a post office box, do not register felons who are not eligible to vote, do not allow one voter to cast more than one mail-in ballot and do not allow one voter to cast ballots both by mail and at a regional voting center.
 - b) Making the decision and establishing a schedule to consolidate elections at one location.
 - c) Continuing to refine and improve the accuracy of the ballot reconciliation process.
2. Establish a limited number of regional voting centers.

Expected Outcomes

All-mail elections should result in; a streamlined elections process; a renewed focus on accuracy; fewer opportunities for fraudulent and inadvertently cast ballots by those not eligible to vote; and reduced opportunities for eligible voters to vote purposely or accidentally more than once.

MANAGEMENT OF ELECTIONS

Issue

As noted in the 2004 CEOC report, conducting accurate, reliable and fair elections is a core function of county government. From 2002 through 2004 King County experienced recurring serious problems in elections documented by reports from the 2004 CEOC, the King County Independent Task Force on Elections and The Election Center. There is a significant management component to many of these problems.

Findings / Observations

- Although elections operations now appear to be adequately funded, it continues to be difficult to recruit and retain quality personnel. This is in part due to the high level of public scrutiny and criticism of the office and the resulting pressure put on staff.
- Concern about the continuity of senior management inhibits recruiting.
- It appears that union and civil service constraints have made it difficult to replace or discipline staff.
- Based on a number of our observations, it still appears that key information is not reaching all staff.

Discussion

Each year since 2002, the County Executive and County Council have taken measures to improve the election operation: a new voter registration/election management system was purchased and installed; training for poll workers was increased and enhanced; the Council made the positions of Director of REALS and the Superintendent of Elections subject to Council confirmation; staff members were terminated or reassigned; and the Council approved 14 new positions to improve the operation of the Elections Section. The County is developing a process to consolidate election operations into a single facility.

It appears that upper managers have the necessary technical skills. Now it is important to concentrate on overall management to create a truly excellent, high-functioning organization. Good management includes the following:

- Good communication – both internal and external: Internally there should be good communication in both directions – from management down and staff up—so staff will be involved, take ownership and provide useful feedback. Feedback from staff and poll workers should be considered and valued. In addition there should be a clear and proactive external communications and media relations strategy.
- Empowerment: Mid- and first-tier managers and supervisors should be empowered to do their jobs.

- **Accountability:** Everyone should understand his/her job and be held accountable for doing it and doing it well.
- **Policies/procedures:** Policies should be clearly established, communicated and followed.
- **Strategic planning:** The organization should look ahead proactively to plan for upcoming projects, tasks and events.
- **Good personnel management:** Issues such as span of control, supervision, performance appraisals, recruiting and hiring temporary and regular staff should be incorporated into overall personnel management.
- **Performance tracking, measurement, evaluation:** Everyone's performance should be monitored, performance standards established and performance measured.
- **Training and documentation:** Staff should be trained to do their jobs, and all procedures should be documented for easy reference.

Recommendations

1. Evaluate and implement, as the Council deems appropriate, the recommendations of the CEOC, the King County Independent Task Force on Elections and The Election Center. The reports prepared by these groups identify opportunities for improved organizational, management and procedural performance.

These reports, conducted by experts in business, politics and government, offer a blueprint for improved organizational effectiveness and sound management oversight and an approach to governance reform borrowed from the best practices of the public and private sectors. Recommendations offered by the oversight groups present sound counsel on dealing with problems of morale, internal communications, staff training and overall organizational culture, all while effectively ensuring rigorous compliance with election laws, policies and procedures.
2. Do not hire a turnaround team. The CEOC believes that hiring an outside organization to run the Elections Section seems an ancillary, short-term effort which is likely to undermine the existing management. In addition it is not clear that a turnaround team would conform to State and County law. Instead, the committee suggests providing funding for REALS to hire a consultant to advise and mentor the REALS Director in management and leadership.
3. Promote wholesale open, two-way communication within elections through multiple formats. Allowing the CEOC to present this final report to the staff would be an example.
4. Promote a feeling of well being, inclusion and empowerment, thereby achieving cultural change and a deeper commitment to excellence.
5. Move into a single consolidated elections facility to promote better communication and work flow, achieve a feeling of inclusion and empowerment and create an esprit de corps. The lack of a consolidated

facility creates a serious management issue as well as security and accuracy issues.

6. Establish clearly defined responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities for each position. Establish individual performance metrics at all levels to achieve structured evaluations that will support rewards, promotions and disciplinary actions.
7. Give management the tools needed to ensure staff performance and accountability. Work with the unions to negotiate agreements that do not impede control over performance of staff. We believe everyone wants to have quality elections. Operational adjustments may be required.
8. Recognize and reward excellence day in and day out.
9. Provide ongoing training for all staff; provide supervisory training for all those who supervise staff (both regular and seasonal) and management. Provide training in strategic planning for mid- and upper-level managers.
10. Improve the processes and flow charts that depict the many and varied functions/responsibilities of elections.
11. Maintain vigilance against the conditions that led to problems in the past. In particular the County must fund elections at an appropriate level; hire top quality managers; have a clear mission, goals and strategic plan; continuously invest in staff; establish and maintain quality control; use performance measures and hold individuals accountable; and provide leadership from all levels of county government.

Expected Outcomes

Implementing these recommendations should help the Elections Section to function as a team with high morale and willing to do whatever it takes to do the job well and should help increase public confidence in the elections process in King County.

VOTER REGISTRATION DATABASE

Issue

Errors in voter registration records have undermined public confidence in the election process.

Findings / Observations

- Elections staff have made many improvements in tracking and processing new voter registrations. The County has also added staff with specialized experience to track and maintain existing records better.
- Despite improvements in the voter registration system, some voters were registered more than once in the database and received more than one ballot in the mail. Some ballots were mailed to recently deceased voters after family members communicated to their elected officials about having trouble removing them from the rolls.
- Some voters are not registered in the precinct where they actually live or have legal residency but at a location where they receive mail that is not a personal residence. Once notified of this situation, many voters have updated their records so that they will receive the appropriate ballot at their personal mail box in the future. Many records still need to be investigated and possibly corrected.
- Some voters with nontraditional living situations are not getting appropriate information or, in some cases, the help they need from Elections staff to register properly.
- Errors in voter registration were cited as a problem in the recent audit by the Election Center.
- Some in the general public do not have confidence that King County is creating and maintaining accurate voter registration records and do not have confidence that each resident has a single registration and is voting in the precinct where that person legally resides.
- Fact finding Elections staff is making progress in cleaning up voter records. As of January 2005, 1,378 felons and 8,434 deceased voters were removed from the database.

Recommendations

1. Elections staff need to be proactive in terms of maintaining accurate records for each voter.
2. Responsibility for keeping the voter records accurate should be primarily that of the Elections Section. However private citizens should also be able to help by establishing a new process to assist the Elections staff in keeping the voter

records up to date. This new process should be separate from the challenge process.

3. The Elections Section should better inform the public about how and where to register to vote and how to fill out the form accurately. The section should initiate an ad campaign, similar to the animated “Make Your Vote Count” campaign of 2004, and aggressively promote the “You Only Get One Vote – Make It Count” campaign put forth by the Secretary of State’s office.
4. The Elections Section should rely on the best, most accurate search technology to clean up the voter rolls, not simply the DIMS system, so each voter is empowered to receive and cast only one ballot. Elections management need to provide adequate staffing to clean up the existing records. The database managers need to be trained in this type of work.
5. Outreach, via letters and posters, to managers of personal mailbox locations, storage facilities and other places where people receive mail but do not live, may help both the owner of the location and the patrons to know the law and comply with it.

Expected Outcomes

Implementing these recommendations should result in reduced errors in the voter registration database, fewer voters receiving multiple ballots in the mail, fewer ballots cast by felons and on behalf of deceased voters, fewer challenged voters or ballots, and increased public confidence and participation in the election process.

ELECTION SECURITY

Issue

Effective, vigilant and verifiable security for all aspects of the election process is essential to ensuring that “all elections shall be free and equal.” (Washington Constitution, Article I, Section 19)

Findings / Observations

The May 2004 CEOC report stated: “Security of the voting process is key to ensuring the public’s confidence in elections.” In recent months the CEOC and other observers have witnessed major security improvements by King County. But clearly there is room for further progress. Fundamental security principles include:

Physical Security

- Restricting access to ballots, facilities and operations to election workers and observers for authorized purposes.
- Monitoring all access to ballots, facilities and operations to prevent unauthorized access.
- Employing a minimum of two election workers whenever ballots are processed or transported. Having open-plan work stations so that individuals do not work in isolation.
- Enhancing control and monitoring of ballots, facilities and operations **during** elections.
- Relying on King County Sheriff deputies for election security.
- Using keys, logs, ballot cages, camera monitoring and motion sensors.
- Monitoring vendors used to print, mail, sort and otherwise process ballots.
- Monitoring poll workers to account for all voted and unused poll ballots.
- Ensuring that all provisional ballots are properly issued, processed and accounted for and are incapable of being counted in error using poll site ballot tabulators.
- Ensuring all duplicated ballots (recording voter intent when original ballots are damaged, misprinted or miss-marked by the voter) are properly processed.
- Creating and documenting emergency procedures for dealing with natural and man-made disasters.
- Conducting random inspections, tests and double checks of all security.

Electronic Security

- Restricting and monitoring access to computer systems used for voter registration (DIMS) and ballot tabulation (GEMS).
- Isolating GEMS from the Internet or other networks to limit the potential for deliberate hacking or inadvertent corruption.

- Working with DIMS/GEMS vendor Diebold, as well as independent experts and critics, to ensure the highest security standards.
- Ensuring that mandatory Logic and Accuracy tests (including related testing of poll site tabulators) fully identify and prevent all sources of fraud and error.
- Relying as much as possible on paper ballots rather than electronic ballots.

Ballot Reconciliation

- Accounting daily for all ballots printed, issued, spoiled, voted, unvoted and duplicated, as well as all absentees issued, verified, opened, tabulated and rejected.
- Monitoring closely the counting and recording of all challenged absentee ballots as invalid until they are ultimately rejected or counted.
- Examining all opened absentee return envelopes for unprocessed ballots.
- Canvassing all poll books, ballots and materials to verify the accuracy of information recorded and to identify and resolve problems.
- Streamlining procedures to limit potential for fraud, error or confusion.
- Referring “problem” ballots to the Canvassing Board for review and adjudication.
- Imposing rigorous quality controls and double checks to catch and rectify errors.

Election Observation

- Observing means seeing and understanding **all** election operations with due safeguards to protect ballot secrecy and privileged voter information.
- Providing detailed documentation of election procedures to observers for each process they observe.
- Providing detailed statistics (including reconciliation data, interim and final precinct canvass reports) on a timely basis to observers, media and the public.
- Ensuring that observers have access to election supervisors for questions, concerns and suggestions.
- Allowing observers at each ballot processing or tabulating station.

Planning and People

- Developing a detailed election security plan with set timelines, priorities and goals.
- Working with the King County Sheriff, election experts, observers, independent experts, the public, supporters and critics to develop physical, electronic and observation security plans.
- Seeking the fullest input from election workers at all levels to plan and improve security.
- Training and testing all election managers, staff, workers, guards and observers in the basics of good security, including the role of openness and accountability.
- Constantly testing, evaluating, critiquing and improving election security planning and implementation based upon actual experience.

Discussion

Election security is required by state law as an essential component of every part of the voting process. King County **must** empower and encourage workers, observers and voters to detect mistakes or misconduct so problems can be addressed, corrected and prevented in the future.

Recommendations

Election security is and will always be a critical mission for King County and the Elections Section. The following recommendations are based upon hands-on observations by the CEOC as well as input from the Office of the Secretary of State, the King County Independent Elections Task Force on Elections and the audit. They highlight the most immediate security needs, priorities and potential improvements.

1. Develop a comprehensive election security plan by June 1, 2006.
2. Draft the security plan in close consultation with the Secretary of State, other election administrators, King County Sheriff's Office, observers, security experts, the public, elections critics and supporters and King County voters.
3. Implement security planning as fully as possible for the 2006 Primary and General Elections with constant evaluation and improvement before, during and after each election.
4. Conduct random inspections of all election facilities on an ongoing basis to uncover security flaws so they can be corrected.
5. Expand the canvassing procedures to allow for hand counts of poll ballots in more than three precincts with the support of major political parties. Also conduct hand counts of randomly selected poll sites and absentee ballots in at least one precinct and /or absentee batch per legislative district.
6. Hold elections vendors and subcontractors to the highest security standards, monitoring and accountability through the contracting process.
7. Require small shrink-wrapped ballot packages to be sealed by the vendor.
8. Continue consolidating and upgrading King County election facilities with the goal of a single state-of-the-art elections center by 2007. This is the single most important security recommendation the CEOC can make or that King County government can implement.

Expected Outcomes

Careful review and improvement of all aspects of security will assure the public that that secrecy, accuracy and security of the voting, tabulating and reporting process is paramount.

ELECTED AUDITOR

Issue

Should the Elections Director be elected or appointed and should elections be a stand-alone function?

Findings / Observations

- The top Elections official in King County is currently appointed by the County Executive, as one of numerous appointed heads of county divisions. However, due to the importance of the position, the Council must confirm the County Executive's appointment of this division director as well as the position of Superintendent of Elections (who reports to the director).
- Thirty-eight of Washington's 39 counties have elected auditors.
- The state's top election official, the Secretary of State, is elected rather than appointed by the governor.
- After the 2004 Election, many citizens expressed strong dissatisfaction with the current appointed Auditor and have called for making this an elected position.

Discussion

An elected auditor will increase public confidence because he/she will be directly answerable to the people for the performance of the office. An elected auditor would contribute to the independence and professionalism of the Elections Section by focusing the organization on a single core mission – running elections.

The CEOC unanimously agreed that conducting elections is important enough to be a stand-alone function. The present licensing and records duties of the division should be assigned to other departments.

Making the head of elections a non-partisan elected official sends a positive message to full-time election employees. It would emphasize that their work is an essential, independent and non-partisan part of our democratic system of government and worthy of being headed by an elected official. Election workers at all levels would be better able to operate free of any appearance of political influence.

Creating an elected auditor is the kind of basic organizational change needed to show voters that King County has thoroughly reformed its elections system. It signals to the public that the problems that occurred in 2004 are being successfully addressed and will not be repeated.

An elected auditor would have to raise money, garner endorsements and conduct a political campaign just like other candidates for public office. For this reason the office should be made a non-partisan position.

Some members of the CEOC feel that an elected auditor would not necessarily improve public confidence or improve the conduct of elections. A non-partisan elected auditor by itself is no guarantee against future controversy. It is possible that in a future-contested election an elected auditor could be just as much a focus of controversy as under the current appointment system. On the positive side the public would have an opportunity to hold the auditor accountable at the next election, which they cannot do for an appointee.

Recommendations

1. Make the auditor's position in King County a non-partisan, popularly-elected office.
2. Reassign licensing and other non-elections related responsibilities of the Elections Division to other county departments.

Expected Outcomes

Making the auditor a non-partisan elected position would promote a dramatic increase in public trust in King County elections. The Elections Section would no longer be seen as just a routine county department under the control of the County Executive. The higher level of importance given to an elected office would help ensure continued public scrutiny long after the current elections controversy has ended, thus helping to avoid a repeat of the elections problems of the past.

BALLOTS

Issue

King County's ballots are printed by a private contractor, under the supervision of King County Elections employees. In every election, some ballots that have printing errors slip through to the voters.

Findings / Observations

In the 2004 General Election the red ovals were missing on one side of the ballot in some instances, which threw some voters into confusion. Many of these ballots were sent to the Canvassing Board for review. In other instances the ink was significantly faded or the timing marks were misaligned, so the ballots had to be duplicated.

In the 2005 General Election, some ballots were printed with incorrect ballot codes. When errors do occur, King County Elections has the ability to quickly correct the problem in most cases through its ballot on demand system. Correctly printed ballots can be rushed to a polling place on Election Day or mailed to absentee voters in advance of the day of the election.

The ballot production environment at the printing facility in Everett is not currently observed by the political parties.

Discussion

While some instances of voter disenfranchisement are possible due to ballot printing and production errors, the error rate is small and the quality control measures in place are sufficient to prevent most problems from occurring.

Ballot security is of greater concern. King County Elections must have two staff members on site during the entire ballot production process, and at least one Elections employee must be available to answer questions from citizen or political party observers who might be on site.

Recommendations

1. The Elections Section should continue to have a presence in the ballot production process and should continue its efforts to minimize ballot printing and production errors. Resources should not be diverted away from this task. Furthermore, as the integrity of an election depends on the security measures in place during the ballot production process, observers should be allowed to participate.
2. King County Elections should develop a security plan for the purpose of enhanced control, accounting and monitoring of all ballots in the ballot production process.

Expected Outcome

With appropriate measures in place, large-scale ballot errors are much less likely.

HAVA DISABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Issue

Achieve full compliance with the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) regarding accommodations for disabled voters.

Findings / Observations

King County demonstrated the equipment that it intends to provide at several polling locations on November 8. It is a machine made by Diebold and is referred to as DAVE (Disabled Accessible Voting Equipment). It is accessible to voters with hearing, vision, motor and other disabilities. It can also be programmed for other languages.

Discussion

HAVA was enacted by Congress in 2002. It requires that all counties must have available voting equipment that can be used by voters with disabilities by January 1, 2006. The 2005 state legislature passed a bill that requires a voter-verifiable paper trail for all voting systems. To implement this, the state asked for and received an extension to the first federal election in 2006 (the September Primary).

The voter uses a touch screen to cast his/her vote. The machine prints an ATM type verification of the voted ballot, which can be viewed by the voter. This printout stays in the machine. This equipment will be modified to provide a voter-verifiable record. Tapes are run when the polls close for tabulating at a central location. If a recount is needed, the results from this machine will always be the same. King County is planning to buy 650 of the DAVE machines and is negotiating a buyback provision with the vendor.

Recommendations

1. King County should negotiate terms for the HAVA required devices that allow for potential consolidation of polling places or adoption of vote-by-mail with regional voting centers. Note: CEOC is aware the contracts have been signed. The spirit of this recommendation is to consider decisions being made today in light of the major changes to the election process being proposed.
2. Poll workers assigned to DAVE machines should be trained in the use of the equipment and in working with persons with disabilities.

Expected Outcomes

Implementation should result in full compliance with the letter and spirit of HAVA, including voters with disabilities having access to voting that is accessible and accommodating, ballots in languages other than English being readily available and a voter-verifiable paper trail being created.

POLLING PLACES

Issue

King County has 526 polling places. The logistical and financial challenges of supporting a large number of sites, including difficulties in finding enough poll workers, create a major issue for well-run elections.

Findings / Observations

Although most polling places serve more than one precinct, each polling place has one Accuvote ballot tabulation machine and requires an Accuvote judge, a provisional ballot judge, in addition to the inspector(s), and poll book judges for each precinct. Some polling places are not easily accessible to voters with disabilities. Some polling places are located in facilities where the primary use (e.g., school, church or community center) takes precedence.

Discussion

The logistics of assembling and delivering poll materials to 500+ locations throughout King County is a burden that is increasingly challenging to Elections Section employees and poll workers. The potential for delivery errors and security breaches is a concern. The Washington State Legislature has authorized counties to adopt vote-by-mail on a countywide basis for all elections.

Recommendations

1. King County should prepare for transition to vote-by-mail. To ensure public confidence that mailed ballots are sent to eligible voters and are accurately accounted for in return and tabulation, King County should demonstrate this capability in a countywide election.
2. Countywide vote-by-mail should provide for regional voting centers where equipment for voters with disabilities is available and where voters can drop off mail-in ballots.
3. Consideration should be given to accommodation for voters who prefer to vote in person. If specific ballot codes cannot be generated at the regional center, provisional ballots could be used.
4. If vote-by-mail is not adopted in time for the 2008 Primary Election, King County should continue to consolidate precincts and polling places.

Expected Outcomes

Implementing these recommendations should result in election employees and poll workers who are well-trained to manage poll voting, absentee voting and HAVA requirements and enhanced security from the consolidation of facilities and processes because ballots will pass through fewer hands. This will also help satisfy HAVA requirements.

PRECINCT SIZE

Issue

Very small precincts are difficult and expensive to support with adequate staff and materials. Precincts with a small number of voters have created problems concerning ballot secrecy.

Findings / Observations

- King County has 2,554 precincts. King County has 79 precincts with fewer than 200 active registered voters and 1,051 precincts with more than 400 voters.
- Every polling place requires one or more inspectors plus one judge per precinct for the poll book. By law each precinct can elect one Precinct Committee Officer for each party.
- By county ordinance precincts are to have between 200 and 400 voters. State law allows precincts of up to 900 voters.

Discussion

It has been increasingly difficult to recruit and train qualified poll workers to serve this number of precincts. CEOC members who observed poll worker training for both the 2005 Primary and General Elections saw that there were many more accountability procedures put in place at both the opening and closing of polls. Delivering poll materials to more than 500 polling places is a logistical burden that increases the potential for security breaches. Delivering the Accuvote boxes and all materials after the polls close presents the same issues.

The size and number of precincts is connected to the significance of the role of Precinct Committee Officers and the political parties.

Recommendations

1. King County should strive to consolidate precincts. The County should work with political parties and other stakeholders to resolve the process of selecting Precinct Committee Officers in a way that would maintain their role without impeding the consolidation of precincts and polling places.
2. Consolidate the reporting of returns from small precincts, precincts with small turnout, or small vote-reporting categories, such as provisional ballots, as is done in other counties to preserve the secrecy of the ballot.

Expected Outcomes

Implementation should result in more efficiency in the logistics of moving materials; fewer workers being needed, allowing for more thorough training in new requirements; and preservation of ballot secrecy.

PRIMARY DATE AND ELECTION CERTIFICATION DATE

Issue

There is not enough time between the primary and general election to adequately prepare for the general election. There is not adequate time to certify the primary election.

Findings / Observations

- The current primary date, the third Tuesday in September, and related primary deadlines, such as the election certification date for the September primary, have created problems for the Elections staff in the past. When staff work long hours with unrealistic deadlines, errors occur.
- When there is a very close election, one or more recounts of the ballots are required. In a county as large as King, this has caused added difficulties in the past with regard to meeting the election certification deadline.
- King County has yet to prove the ability to reconcile the ballots to a sufficient level, although improvements have been evident.
- There have been times in the past when the Canvassing Board has had to make determinations on so many ballots or voters that they have worked right up to the certification deadline to get everything completed on time, especially when a vote or voter has been challenged.
- When an election outcome is unknown until the primary certification date, little time is left to prepare and mail ballots for the general election.
- An added consequence is very little time (a few days) remaining for campaigns (both candidates and issues) to prepare and inform all voters prior to the general election. Campaign activities require lead time for activities such as printing information and planning events, which cannot begin until the outcome of the primary is determined.

Discussion

There is not enough time to canvass properly and certify the primary election. Also there is not enough time following certification of the primary to prepare ballots carefully and mail them by statutory deadlines should a recount be necessary. Also, under current state law, ballots must be counted right up to the time of certification. This creates potential problems for the Canvassing Board to meet the simultaneous demands of canvassing and certifying.

Adding time between the primary election date and the certification date should help improve the accuracy of the reconciliation process and cut down on human errors.

Recommendations

1. The primary election should be held earlier in the year.
2. More time should be allowed for certification of the primary election.
3. A legislative change to allow one day between the cutoff for counting ballots and certifying the election should be supported.

Expected Outcomes

Following these recommendations should result in sufficient time to canvass properly and certify the primary election, fewer human errors, greater accuracy in reconciling ballots and votes, and meeting the statutory deadlines for mailing military and overseas ballots for the general election more easily.

BUSINESS AND OPERATION PLAN

Issue

How can the REALS Director, managers and staff make the plan a reality?

Findings / Observations

The REALS Director has developed a good business plan that identifies the Elections Section's mission as well as federal and state mandates and policies. The plan establishes guiding principles for the section as well as goals, objectives, actions and performance measures.

Key areas of interest here include building a model elections administration organization and improving and stabilizing the Elections Section work environment and staffing.

- The total workforce conducting King County elections consists of fulltime professional employees, temporary long-term workers (TLTs) and seasonal employees to assist with larger elections.
- Fulltime King County election workers are not simply "Administrative Support Employees," as they are sometimes described. These fulltime professional employees become first-line managers when elections are held, and they must oversee one of the largest county election operations in the country. They manage a complex and wide-ranging organization that at times approaches 4,000 employees processing a million ballots.
- All fulltime King County Elections employees, except a handful of those in upper-management positions, are required to be members of a union.
- The Elections Section has not yet achieved key elements of its Business & Operations Plan that relate to a) building a model elections administration organization and b) improving and stabilizing the Elections Section work environment and staffing.

Discussion

Throughout this report the CEOC has attempted to note objectively the improvements that management and staff have made in the conduct of elections while just as objectively noting areas where improvement is necessary.

In attempting to become an excellent elections organization, the business plan recognizes that the organization must create a positive, functional workplace environment. The plan recognizes that morale must improve, staff must be well trained, employee turnover must be reduced and everyone must be held accountable.

While the overall performance of the Elections Section seems to have improved substantially since the 2004 General Elections, the CEOC believes that more improvement is needed and that the improvements made to date are not yet

stabilized. The organization must commit itself to a sustainable path of continuous quality improvement. It is the opinion of the CEOC that outside assistance would be very helpful to stabilize the progress made and sustain it into the future.

Improving morale and reducing staff turnover are essential to achieving sustainable excellence. Recently senior management and other staff have left the organization. The CEOC does not know the circumstances surrounding these departures and makes no judgments. However, it is a concern and is symptomatic of the challenge faced through all levels of the organization. Several key elements will be necessary for success in this area. These include:

- Sufficient training and mentoring must be provided so that every employee who desires it can be successful. People must be placed in jobs within the organization that match their skill sets.
- Employees must be supported through training and mentoring while at the same time being held accountable.
- Employees throughout the organization must be held to the same level of accountability using similar mechanisms.
- As with most of King County, the Elections Section is highly unionized. This requires labor and management to negotiate agreements that allow management sufficient flexibility to meet operational requirements while protecting employees. Running successful elections is demanding on everyone in the organization. Certain working conditions unique to elections are likely to be necessary.

Recommendations

The REALS Director should:

1. Hire a consultant to help the organization achieve excellence through implementing best management practices, reducing turnover, enhancing performance, improving morale, establishing individual and group performance measures and giving other advice as needed.
2. Examine job requirements and see how they match up with employee skill sets. If necessary, provide sufficient training for employees to be successful in their current jobs or reassign them. Work collaboratively with the union or non-represented employees in this process.
3. Develop individual and group performance measures and hold everyone to the same standards of accountability.
4. Ensure that all labor agreements provide for sufficient management flexibility while protecting employees from capricious or unfair treatment.
5. Continue to implement the Business and Operations Plan.

Expected Outcomes

By implementing the Business and Operations Plan as well as the recommendations of this report, the Elections Section will become a model

elections administration organization, staff morale will improve and staff turnover will be reduced, management will have the flexibility it needs to direct staff, staff will have support and training opportunities to help assure them success in their jobs, staff will have appropriate stability and safeguards in their workplace, and public confidence in elections will be enhanced.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Issue

The Elections Section must have a comprehensive media communications plan to:

- Convey pertinent information to voters.
- Remain open, transparent and accountable.
- Communicate in a crisis.

Finding/Observations

- The Elections Division has a comprehensive media communications plan designed to maximize the County's ability to respond to media inquiries while still disseminating necessary information to voters.
- The plan is based on a model developed by the Miami-Dade County elections office following the Presidential Elections in 2000 and 2004.
- The plan was made more complete in the 2005 election cycle by:
 - Additional Public Information Officers (PIO).
 - One-on-one media contacts.
 - News releases and fact sheets prior to and during election.
 - Web-based election-related content dissemination.
 - E-mail questions and answers.
 - Voter and staff phone help lines.
 - Press conferences.
 - Access for media to high-level staffers.
 - Bus advertisements on proper voting techniques.
 - Media tours of facilities.
 - Media briefings held by managers on location.

Discussion

The media communications plan incorporated many of the recommendations offered by the CEOC in the May 2004 report. More effort was placed on creating relationships with reporters responsible for covering election issues, including allowing them better access. Additionally, based on conversations with reporters, high marks were given to Elections staff for using Public Information Officers from other county departments to answer calls and questions to assist in meeting deadlines, sending fax sheets in anticipation of the needs of reporters, providing access to knowledgeable staffers, setting up phone banks, and giving facility tours.

Recommendations

1. Continue on-going outreach and proactive public education on keeping voter registration information current and how to fill out ballots properly to reduce the need for ballot duplications.
2. Continue to ensure that the REALS Director or the Superintendent of the Elections Section is available to media during highly-visible election cycles.
3. Seek feedback from the media to assess the effectiveness of Elections Division communications and to ask what needs improvement.

Expected Outcomes

King County will have an election operation that continues to listen and communicate well with voters through various media, making elections transparent and accurate. This will help restore public confidence in the elections process.

RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL

As stated in the legislation establishing the CEOC, it was directed to:

...recommend to the Council what, if any, ongoing role a citizens' election oversight committee should have. The recommendations may consider factors such as: committee composition; duration; role; and responsibilities.

Based on the experience of the previous CEOC as well as the current one, members make the following comments.

- Under the County Charter, ultimate responsibility for conducting elections rests with the County Executive and the Director of REALS. The Council has the important role of oversight of elections.
- It is important that any future CEOC have a balanced and diverse membership as has been the case for the last two committees;
- It is essential that CEOC members be trained in the procedures of preparing for, conducting, canvassing and certifying an election. This type of experience can be achieved through attending training sessions for employees and through observing all phases of elections;
- An oversight committee must have a clearly defined role and responsibilities, including a reporting relationship.

Elections operations throughout the state and in King County in particular, are undergoing significant change. Sources of change include new elections laws and procedures from the past session of the legislature; probable new laws and procedures from the current legislative session; changing state and county roles related to maintaining voter registration rolls due to HAVA requirements; potentially a new, consolidated facility for county elections operations; potentially all-mail elections for King County.

Recommendations

1. Reauthorize the Citizens' Election Oversight Committee as an ongoing activity.
2. Maintain balanced membership as has been the past practice.
3. Ensure oversight of elections is the primary responsibility of any new oversight committee. After each election, the committee should report on the election regarding things done well and things needing improvement. A new CEOC may also make recommendations to the County on elections-related issues. Continue to seek out and appoint experienced elections observers or provide training opportunities for new appointees.
4. Continue quarterly meetings, which are probably sufficient, in addition to observing elections.

5. Ensure future CEOCs monitor progress on implementing improvements as directed by the Council, drawing on the audit and reports that have been completed on King County elections.

APPENDIX

King County Ordinance 151517

CEOC Members

CEOC Observation Report Form

