



The National Vote at Home Institute

Recommendations

The 2020 election year was almost beyond comprehension. Voter Registration and Election (VRE) staff is to be commended for all their hard work and dedication. The combination of a pandemic, conducting eight elections, a large increase in absentee ballots, a record setting increase in registered voters, record turnout, a 100% hand recount of the November election, a 100% rescanning of the November election and highly scrutinized US Senate runoff election made this year extremely challenging, to say the least. This was a true team effort of VRE staff, the Board of Elections, the county staff and leadership, election judges, temporary workers and partners.

This overview is to highlight recommendations made in other reports and to recommend top priorities. As you are well aware, now is the time to plan and implement the lessons learned from 2020 and 2018. The two reports that this overview pulls from are the DeKalb county commissioned report *Recommendations: DeKalb County Voter Registration and Elections* written by the Election Group and the NVAHI final report on Nov 24.

While all the recommendations still stand and are important, we would recommend starting with election administration processes and planning, staffing, and acquiring additional space.

Election Administration Processes and Planning

The margin of victory in Georgia elections incredibly close in the 2020 election. President Joe Biden won Georgia by 11,000+ votes. A large county like DeKalb over 500,000 voters contribute in significant portion to the total votes cast in an election. The margin that a candidate wins an election is impacted by voter turn out, and can also be impacted by the processing and acceptance of absentee and in person ballots.

While election processes have always been important, the narrow margins that we see in statewide elections amplifies this importance. Key areas for DeKalb to focus on to ensure that the process doesn't impact the outcome of an election are:

- The outreach, reception and timely processing of voter registration and absentee applications
- Timely mailing and tracking of ballots to those that requested an absentee ballot
- Ensuring secure chain of custody and monitoring of voter registration and absentee applications to ensure they are all accounted for and processed in a timely manner
- Ensuring secure chain of custody and monitoring for election ballots as they make their way through the internal processes from reception through tabulation
- Planning, monitoring and adjusting staffing to accommodate the needs of these processes as volumes increase.
- Having written and transparent processes for each phase of the election
- Using data to drive planning and improve election processes

In addition to the processes themselves, it is imperative that the culture continue to be developed and reinforced. A culture that emphasizes the importance of the duties of the job, how the election processes fit together and the impact they have on the outcome of an election. The idea of democracy becomes a reality with each individual step in the process performed accurately and efficiently every time.

Staffing:

Hiring 3 key positions to be part of the permanent staff:

- **COO/ Deputy Director**- Responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of the office and working with other county departments to meet the needs of the VRE office. This position has been discussed at several board meetings and we encourage the board and VRE to continue this process and get someone hired.
- **Communication and Outreach Coordinator**- Responsible for internal and external communication. In addition to the regular communication work, this position should also oversee and/or assist with stakeholder outreach. DeKalb has an amazing community and great progress was made working with the community to support and promote the elections. This work needs to be continued and improved with a strategic plan to engage stakeholders in an ongoing process to improve the voting experience and accessibility for all DeKalb county current voters, those eligible but not voting and future voters.
- **PMP Certified Project Manager**- responsible for creating and managing a comprehensive election project plan with areas dedicated to each phase of the process. The project plan would ideally be created for a two year cycle in order to see how all of the elections fit together in time and ensure that staffing is appropriate for the demand of the election year.. The DeKalb VRE did hire a special projects person that was task orientated vs creating and managing the complex timelines, schedules and deliverables.

Election Processing Space

One of the key improvements made for the 2020 election was the use of additional space that was occupied by the facilities division. Without the use of the space processing all of the absentee ballots in a timely manner would've been impossible. A top priority for the 2021 year is to find a permanent solution to the base needs and begin to re-design the space to meet the actual processes and flow of an election. We recommend bringing an expert in the area of space and process design to ensure that the space is maximized for efficiency, security and transparency.

Conclusion- While strides were made in the 2020 election there is still much work to be done for DeKalb to become a leader in the election community. It will take strong leadership with clear vision, resources to implement and a dedicated team.