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May 29, 2020

**John Manson**

DeKalb County Government  
Board of Commissioners Office  
1300 Commerce Drive, 5th Floor  
Decatur, GA 30030

Dear Mr. Manson,

Please find the **Final Report & Assessment Notes for Implementation**. It has been a pleasure to complete our review of the DeKalb County Voter Registration and Election Office. This report addresses all the required deliverables of the contract as well as the comments, questions, and feedback we received from the draft report submitted on April 30, 2020. In addition to revising and adding to our recommendations, this final report includes our assessment notes for the implementation plan outlining, for each recommendation, the time frame during which it might be implemented, the potential impact on 2020 success, and a general cost categorization.

We have also included a sample step-by-step process guide to illustrate the type of procedure documents that the VRE office could benefit from developing.

We've appreciated the opportunity to work with the Board of County Commissioners, the Board of Election Commissioners, and the working group on this project. We hope this report becomes the foundation for transforming the DeKalb VRE Department into the model that all of Georgia looks to follow for election administration procedures and practices.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Morrell

Amber McReynolds

Noah Praetz



# Recommendations

DeKalb County Voter Registration & Elections



PREPARED BY:

**THE ELECTIONS GROUP**

AMBER MCREYNOLDS

JENNIFER MORRELL

NOAH PRAETZ

PREPARED FOR:

**THE DEKALB COUNTY BOARD  
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

MAY 29, 2020

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# Introduction



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DeKalb Board of Elections has the potential to deliver premier election services to county residents. From our vantage point, there do not appear to be insurmountable impediments to significant performance growth over the coming months and years. From interviews with stakeholders, county and board leadership, and executive management teams, there appears to be alignment on goals moving forward, despite significant disagreements looking backward.

We begin this report with acknowledgments and recommendations regarding the human and physical investments necessary to position the Board to operationalize the election specific recommendations that follow. To be clear, without investment, particularly in an executive-level management capacity, the recommendations that follow will be difficult to implement.

The report moves into an extensive list of recommended actions based upon opportunities we specifically identified to improve the operations and others we assume to exist but we were not able to observe. It is fair to say that many recommendations flow from observed gaps. Readers should also know that almost every election office in the country has many, if not most, of the same opportunities. This does not dwell on past practice or go into detail on current operations. Instead it is focused on opportunities to improve efficiency, service, transparency and security moving forward. We believe the DeKalb VRE Office and its leadership could implement most of these over the course of the coming years with support. Where possible, we noted the changing environment given the current public health crisis.

# Recommendations

## 1

### Invest in an executive-level management team with the capabilities to enact meaningful change

Organizational change is bound to succeed when you have a skilled, motivated, and cohesive team, championed by top management and implemented in a department that is already receptive to change. It is almost certain to fail when the team is inexperienced, unenthusiastic and disjointed, without any top-level support, and the function of change is equated to a lot of extra work. The circumstances for most organizations are somewhere in the middle.

Given the size of the voter base that the Board of Elections serves, with over 600,000 voters, and the performance goals and opportunities detailed in the pages that follow, we assess that there is a need for four, high-level leaders to fill major gaps and effectively execute change. It may be possible to do this with three additional full-time employees if the skill set mix is present in particular candidates. Those individuals would focus on Operations, Communications, Project Management, and Stakeholder Engagement.



We note that given the legal framework and operational independence enjoyed by the Board, these individuals should be in the organization chart of the Board of Elections. However, as funders, the County Commissioners should expect movement on the recommendations listed in the pages that follow should they choose to invest in this area. We note that particularly important is the Stakeholder Engagement investment whose primary function is to liaise between the funding body and the Board of Elections successfully. We debated as to whether this position should sit inside of the operations of the County Commissioners or whether it belonged in the Board of Elections. We came to the consensus that a person with mixed loyalties decreases accountability and the entanglement would likely not aid in successful relations.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### 1.1 Hire a Chief Operating Officer (COO)

In an organization the size of the VRE Department, running operations as complex as modern elections, it is essential to give the chief executive some space to see the field and think past the short-term response. It was clear to us that as currently constituted, the VRE Director was significantly involved in many day-to-day tasks. This is a noble characteristic and an incredibly valuable personal skill set. However, there are simply too many moving parts to ask the chief executive to be the sole operations taskmaster for the organization while also managing policy and executive functions.

### 1.2 Hire a full-time Communications Director.

Given the rapidly changing information environment, DeKalb Elections needs to be a leader in external communications and sharing information with stakeholders and the public. In a high stakes high-stress environment like elections, administrators have the opportunity to engender trust from their constituent groups, including voters, poll workers, candidates, third party interest groups, and the press. It is clear that there are significant strategic communication opportunities that the Board of Elections could, and we believe should, adopt if they have a resource focused almost entirely on this topic.

We have detailed in other areas of this assessment specific wins that funders and Board leadership should expect to achieve should this investment be made. In short, there are opportunities to significantly enhance the VRE presence on the web, in social media, with public and poll worker facing documentation, and through public communication with earned media and in coordination with the county.

A Communications Director should lead the communications strategy - both external and internal. This includes stakeholder engagement, and thus, we recommend the Stakeholder Engagement Manager be a part of the Communications Team.

To be clear, none of these positions should be siloed, the organization would be best positioned with significant cross training across all functional areas and from bottom to top.

Further, the Board needs to be a trusted source of information and transparency across the operation is critical. Mis- and dis-information campaigns are inevitable and the Board must be the source of trusted and trustworthy information. Foreign adversaries, domestic bad actors, and citizens with inaccurate information can affect the trust in the Board, and by extension, County Government generally. Thus, it is critical for the VRE and Board to establish a clear, concise, and trustworthy communication relationship with the public and stakeholders.

### 1.3 Hire a full-time Project Manager.

With a significant array of enhancements and new projects awaiting the Board, it will be important to effectively manage the time, resources, and risks each project brings. A successful project manager will be held accountable for helping achieve each of the Board's project goals by working with the experts, the management and line staff, to initiate, plan, execute, control and close out the work on various projects.

This process should be done in parallel to the day-to-day functioning of the VRE. It is not realistic to expect anyone on staff, already stretched thin with conducting elections business, to be able to rapidly learn the project management profession. Asking existing staff to successfully embrace and execute some of the opportunities in this document without augmenting their capacity will either stretch the efforts over many years or greatly increase the likelihood of underwhelming results on some projects.

An individual with project management skills will successfully layer the changes the board adopts onto the existing operations, with minimal disruption. Project Management is a profession with accrediting bodies offering degrees and certificate programs that develop the technical skills necessary to support organizational change. It is also a skill set developed through much practice.

#### **1.4 Consider hiring, or merging job duties with other positions, a Stakeholder Engagement Manager.**

Working closely with funders and stakeholders in the community can bring significant rewards for the organizations. For proof, look no further than our mere presence conducting the assessment in partnership with the Working Group. While the Board is an independent, constitutional body, it nevertheless is funded by the County Commissioners. Given the relationship, both bodies and their members would benefit from having a committed liaison between the two.

Beyond the funding body, the Board would benefit from active engagement with organizations involved in the political and public advocacy spheres. There is simply no reason not to focus on building a relationship with the folks who are most invested in the performance of the organization's duties and aligning interests. Deconflicting and minimizing antagonism are very important to the healthy function of democracy.

#### **1.5 Invest in process improvement training for staff and new hires.**

Innovation and process improvement can be augmented by outside expertise but can never be completely outsourced. For the recommendations in this report to be successful, staff must be engaged in the change process.

Various staff members own current processes and for effective improvement the staff must be trained on how to identify and diagnose inefficiencies, improve processes, and learn to be champions of change. Often they hold the necessary keys to implement changes and their engagement at the start is key.

We recommend engaging with an organization that can coach and train staff in lean process improvement and give them the tools to solve problems themselves. There are organizations that have designed this type of training specifically for the needs of local government.

#### **1.6 Cross-train staff and shift resources to accommodate volume fluctuations and service expansions.**

Cross-training staff members makes the organization more adaptable to meet the volume needs as they fluctuate with voter registration, absentee ballots, petitions, or other services. Being willing to shift teams from one task or functional area to another is critical to success.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Invest in an executive management team with the capabilities to enact meaningful change.		Increase management, process improvement, planning and voter outreach manpower in time to impact November election cycle.		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
1.1	Hire a Chief Operating Officer (COO).	Immediate	High	\$\$\$
1.2	Hire a full-time Communications Director.	Immediate	High	\$\$\$
1.3	Hire a full-time Project Manager.	Immediate	High	\$\$
1.4	Consider hiring, or merging job duties with other positions, a Stakeholder Engagement Manager.	Long-Term	Moderate	\$\$
1.5	Invest in process improvement training for staff and new hires.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
1.6	Cross-train staff and shift resources to accommodate volume fluctuations and service expansions.	Long-Term	High	None

# Recommendations

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## 2 Invest in building a secure and modern workspace

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### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

**2.1 Work with a professional workspace designer to build or renovate a larger, process focused space for the VRE offices and equipment warehouse.**

*2.1.1 Create a facility designed for the vote-by-mail process*

The DeKalb Board of Elections is operating a series of disjointed spaces inside of a building complex serving numerous other functions. It inhibits operations by requiring more siloed staffing and supervision. Additionally, it makes it difficult to envision improved operations in areas like training, both external and internal, because of reliance and energy spent procuring additional space for particular functions. The staff feel constrained, and we support movement in this direction that would free them up operationally.

Build out a facility designed for the vote-by-mail processing function and move the mail ballot printing/packaging process to that space if possible. The current work requirements are overflowing the space and solutions are being cobbled together. An investment in right-sizing technology and physical space should be made. This is particularly true in light of COVID-19 and as you consider sharing the process more publicly. Reimagining the workspace should be done in conjunction with the process improvement training outlined in 1.5.



## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### 2.2 Purchase and install a modern, updated security system with badge access, control logs, and remotely accessed cameras.

There are significant gaps in security. The doors are all keyed with no ability to limit access to spaces except for key holders, which are difficult to track. Not having swipe card access makes it impossible to track who enters areas at what times. This is true for the particularly sensitive areas that house the voting equipment and the voting nerve center, the election system, or the “gems” room. A wholesale reevaluation of security protocols, camera locations, badge access systems, paper logging, as well as audit procedures, should be invested in for the Board's sake. These evaluations can be procured without cost from places such as the federal [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#).

### 2.3 Reconfigure the swipe card access and storage locking protocols.

*2.3.1 Add cameras to all work areas that can be accessed by appropriate management staff. The cabinets storing ballots should be rekeyed each election and only provided to the fewest people necessary.*

Some of the best practices for capturing security information, limiting access, and routine digital audits seem to be unavailable, given the technical constraints of the current system. Limit access to only essential personnel. And that should go for other support staff in

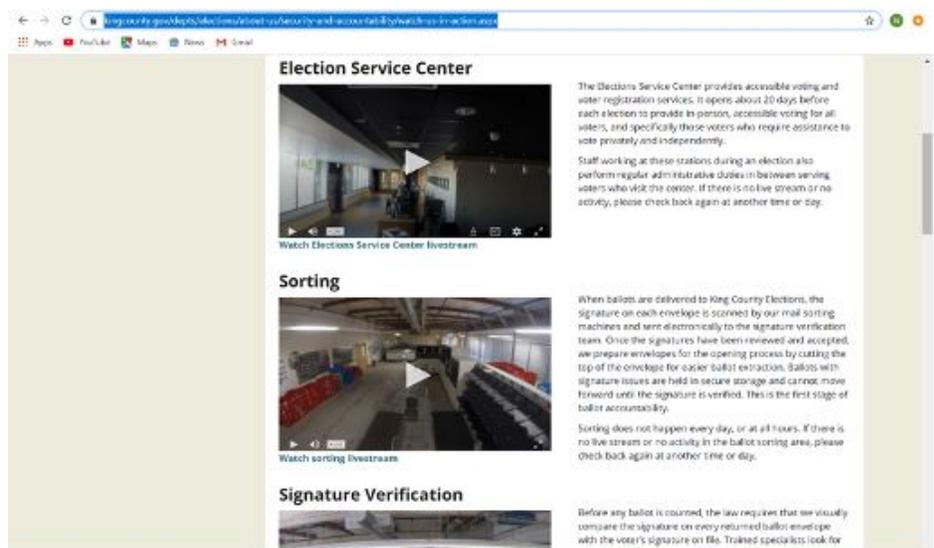
the building like operating engineers, etc. Those that do enter sensitive spaces should never do so alone. While this may add some constraints on movement, such constraints can be managed and are necessary for the crucial days around each election.

There are opportunities to institute new requirements, or increase the adherence to existing policy, and ensure that individuals entering sensitive locations physically sign-into and out of the room using paper based forms. Compliance with those policies should be audited.

### 2.4 Use security cameras to live-stream the mail ballot operation.

Many counties around the country live-stream their mail ballot operation. This could be accomplished with the installation of the cameras, as suggested in this section. Not only does this enhance security, but it is a good win for transparency.

Consider live broadcasting the ballot processing and ballot counting rooms as well. In lieu of your own cameras, the major social media platforms each offer streaming solutions that can be easily used. Other election officials have employed this solution to good effect. The election office in King County, Washington live streams each area of processing during the election. They also provide a video tour to show how ballots are processed while describing each step. The image below shows the streaming video and you can watch the tour videos [here](#).



# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Invest in building a secure and modern workspace.		Prioritize security and space investment to identify urgent security deficits and meet the needs of revised and documented policies and procedures.		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
2.1	Work with a professional workspace designer to build or renovate a larger, process focused space for the VRE offices and equipment warehouse.	Long-Term	Medium	\$\$\$\$\$
2.1.1	Create a facility designed for the vote-by-mail process	Long-Term	Medium	\$\$\$\$
2.2	Purchase and install a modern, updated security system with badge access, control logs, and remotely accessed cameras.	Short-Term	High	\$\$\$
2.3	Reconfigure the swipe card access and storage locking protocols.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
2.3.1	Consider adding cameras to all work areas that can be accessed by appropriate management staff. The cabinets storing ballots should be rekeyed each election and only provided to the fewest people necessary.	Short-Term	High	\$\$\$
2.4	Use security cameras to live-stream the mail ballot operation.	Short-Term	High	\$

# Recommendations

## 3

### Create a culture focused on service, transparency, efficiency and security

The behavioral norms and general way of doing things are the visible manifestation of an organization's culture. You usually see it as soon as you walk through the door; something as simple as the way you are greeted or the degree of clutter you see in a workspace lets people draw inferences about an organization. The inferences may be wrong or at least not be those you would like them to make. Luckily, focusing on a few values and working to ensure that your public face matches those values can offer fast improvement.

Here we focus on four core values; service, transparency, efficiency and security. We encourage the Board and VRE leadership to identify the values that are most important to them and look for ways to cultivate and sustain a high-performance culture. Ultimately the staff's strength and ambition to be the best will lead the way. Change is hard but worth it.

The recommended actions in this section are things that will enhance the office and enhance performance across all of the assessed operations.

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world." Harriet Tubman



### **3.3 Increase Advanced Voting locations and hours to match or surpass neighboring counties and demonstrate DeKalb's commitment to accessible voting options for all.**

Given the current public health crisis, it is foreseeable that finding sufficient numbers of poll workers and adequate facilities for Election Day will be challenging. Expanding the locations and hours for Advanced Voting, combined with expanded use of mail ballots, may allow for a reduction in the number of voting locations and poll workers required on Election Day.

For voters to take advantage of Advanced Voting, locations will need to be conveniently located no more than a 10 minute drive for any voter, coupled with evening and weekend hours. Work with the county GIS department to help pinpoint optimal voting locations and approximate drive times for proposed locations. Some GIS software packages include tools to create interactive maps that can be embedded on the VRE website showing voters where to find their nearest polling location and the days and times it is open. As part of this recommendation we encourage the VRE Dept. to have a GIS counterpart.

Finally, it is reasonable for all four major metro counties to coordinate hours for the November election. This strategic partnership could also pay financial benefits as resources are pooled for public education.

### **3.4 Rewrite and redesign the website to increase functionality, usability and service.**

Creating a modern website that answers voters' questions will be especially important as the current health crisis may require last minute changes on when, where, and how people vote. This should be a top priority and something a Communications Director can oversee.

For help getting started see the Center for Civic Design's field guide, "[Vol. 7: Designing election department websites](#)". The Center for Technology and Civic Life helps election offices with website design and offers a [training series on website design](#). A great example of an election website is [Orange County, California](#).

### **3.5 Focus on enhanced communications.**

*3.5.1 Consider direct mail outreach such as pre-election information postcards.*

*3.5.2 Build a social media presence so that DeKalb County is the trusted voice for election information.*

There are plenty of opportunities for increased and enhanced communications. The Communications Director should build an entire plan from direct mail to social media, to website operations, publication and then for direct in-person outreach. This will be especially important if there is a decreased footprint on Election Day due to public health concerns.

Consider that a large portion of American adults rely on social media platforms for their news. If regular voting information is not being offered in that arena, the vacuum will be filled by others. This is particularly dangerous considering the potential for foreign or domestic actors looking to take advantage of a contentious, hyper-partisan atmosphere. DeKalb County needs to be offering information over social media and not leaving the field to other actors.

### **3.6 Create a call center software application to track incoming calls and provide "scripts" to ensure a factual and uniform message to voters.**

We appreciate that there is a phone number voters can call for questions which is answered by registration staff and temporary workers. Unfortunately, it is not a true "hotline" system with call tracking.

There are call center applications for purchase or applications built by local government entities that can be acquired free of charge. We also recommend coordinating with the county as there may already be a system in place for other agencies. These applications allow VRE leadership to see what is happening, especially on Election Day. Having data specific to why voters are calling and at what volume, allows the VRE team to spot trends and problems early. It also provides information for future process improvement.

Call center applications provide staff a way to look up answers to frequently asked questions. This ensures a correct and uniform answer is being delivered to voters on every call. Additionally, reviewing how incoming customer requests are handled on all platforms and how the data is tracked is critical to continuous improvement.

# TRANSPARENCY

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Board of Election meetings have become a point of contention for some stakeholders. It is a necessary responsibility of the Board to extend every effort to satisfy board meeting attendees. While it can be time consuming, it is a fundamental part of building greater trust in the operations of election administration.

### **3.7 Commit to creating a customer focused environment.**

- 3.7.1 Ensure that every person hoping for a response gets one, either at the meeting or in writing.*
- 3.7.2 Add a website tool so stakeholders can request information or even make complaints online. This provides an opportunity to satisfy constituents and also create some physical separation that can allow cooling off periods. It's easier to "kill 'em with kindness" when responding to a nasty email than when the nasty comment is in person.*
- 3.7.3 Consider live streaming board meetings and other critical activities such as vote tallying, logic and accuracy testing, mail ballot processing, and the packaging and reviewing of ballots upon return. (Examples of this in Recommendation 2.4).*
- 3.7.4 Build a stakeholder advisory group that extends beyond just partisan leadership of the board and includes others who are extremely engaged. There is intrinsic value in hearing from and trying to satisfy the most engaged of your citizen stakeholders.*

### **3.8 Document all standard operating procedures (SOPs) and policies and practices into a single set of documents.**

Building systems that are not reliant on individuals per se, nor their memories, allows the VRE Dept. to be more nimble and adaptable. Further, documentation will help streamline operations, identify potential waste through lean process improvement, and look for efficiencies. Documenting every task is an important effort in understanding how and, more importantly, why things are done.

# EFFICIENCY

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### **3.9 Delegate responsibilities and accountability with any new staff the Board of Elections and Board of County Commissioners invest in.**

If the Board of Elections and Board of County Commissioners agree to invest in additional management staff, the Director should take the opportunity to focus on governance. If operational and project management authority is not properly delegated to new hires, decision making and innovation can be stifled, limiting the effects of the investment. At the same time, to ensure an effective chain of command, the Board's executive management authority, including authority over personnel, should reside with the Director. This provides for the clearest path to organizational accountability. Internal and external stakeholders will understand where the buck stops.

Executive management actions are those of balancing priorities, assigning resources to competing interests, and monitoring the progress of programs and projects - coaching and redirecting where necessary in order to maintain management and staff accountability. However, the Director should try to avoid assuming too much control of programs and projects assigned to managers. Exorbitant time spent on specific programs can lead to the loss of visibility on other projects and can decrease the effectiveness of managers. It also risks the Directors personal assumption of accountability for the successes and failures of programs - blurring the accountability lines within the organization.

It is a difficult balance but the Director, adequately resourced, should focus on building the management team by setting clear expectations and letting the managers meet those expectations. The Director helps by making sure that the authorities of all team members are clear and that management and staff are held accountable for their performance.

### **3.10 Executive leadership must drive more direct reporting from managers and supervisors.**

The focus here is accountability and clarity. The ambitious agenda will only move forward if the management staff has clear operating lanes and accountability benchmarks. That is why, for many of the recommendations, we highlight the need for management to establish appropriate units of measurement and accountability.

### **3.11 All activities managed by the VRE Dept. should be supported by mini-project plans and accompanying calendars that are rolled up to executive leadership.**

Ideally this is done using project management software or applications but can be as simple as creating a shared calendar that all team members can access. A different calendar can be created for each project, new or existing, and deadlines and intermediate goals can be included.

For example, some election jurisdictions use things like Google calendar and have the managers responsible for mail voting, voter registration, UOCAVA, training, etc., each create a calendar of events significant to their mini-project, and then share those calendars with executive leadership and other managers. This gives executive leadership the ability to monitor deliverables and assist where needed.

More sophisticated tools are available and a project manager can help ensure that all tasks and timelines remain on schedule and can coordinate action items, follow-up with staff or vendors as needed, and manage changes in the timeline. Each election is a project, with dozens of mini-projects embedded within. Using the same method of tracking constraints and activities that are dependent upon another's completion can expand the bandwidth of the organization and allow it to layer changes onto a hectic election schedule.

### **3.12 Commit to streamlining processes as listed elsewhere by assigning the improvement plan to your Project Manager.**

These should be tracked in the project calendar and the responsible leader held accountable. Note that project managers are not necessarily business owners or subject matter experts. Their role should be bringing a methodology to assist management and SMEs so that underlying and existing work isn't negatively impacted, and external partners are managed appropriately.

## **SECURITY**

### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

It is evident the VRE Dept. is committed to security by the way poll worker training is conducted, doors are kept locked, name badges are displayed, and their participation in the State cyber hygiene training. With all of the challenges the VRE is facing in the coming year, keeping the focus on security must continue to be a priority. There is an opportunity to increase trust in the outcome of the election when voters see election officials taking security very seriously. These recommendations are meant to enhance the measures already taking place.

### **3.13 Create an election security task force to include office staff, vendors, and strategic internal and external partners.**

Managing the many variables of election security takes a concerted effort. Much of the infrastructure used in elections are actually controlled and governed by other areas of county support. Marshalling their attention can be difficult. It will be imperative to ensure everyone knows who does what and when. Having the necessary contacts made in advance makes much of the difference in whether incidents are handled in a timely and professional manner.

### **3.14 Utilize the investment in a Chief Operating Officer or Project Manager to work with IT to build a full security assessment and implementation plan.**

This should include a physical and cybersecurity review and assessment. This action can potentially be worked in coordination with the Secretary of State and State Department of Homeland Security.

### **3.15 Commit to annual procedural audits of all processes and evaluation of SOPs.**

Once the SOPs are built, it is essential to ensure things are working according to plan and staff behavior is in alignment. This requires an evaluation of daily procedures against the SOPs to ensure there is alignment. Where there is a deviation, either the operation or the documentation should be modified to align both.

At least annually, but ideally prior to the start of an election, conduct procedural audits and walkthroughs of all processes to ensure compliance with SOPs. This function might be performed by the Chief Operating Officer in conjunction with the County Auditor's Office.

### **3.16 Develop and continue to update a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).**

Having documented SOPs will provide the foundation for building a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that envisions all worst-case scenarios and details contingency and communication plans. This is especially true in the registration and vote counting arenas where critical election data is housed. In an environment where foreign adversaries have the capability and intent to disrupt our elections, through actual attacks on digital systems, or through foreign information influence campaigns, having a plan focused on the security of your critical digital systems is vital. At a minimum understanding and building relationships with critical county, state and federal partners is necessary. Capturing their contact information in one place (on paper too), will speed reaction time. Talking to them before something goes wrong is ideal.

The key to successful recovery during and after an incident, no matter the cause, is the speed of recovery. Dedicate time prior to each election for brainstorming worst-case scenarios, building decision trees, and listing the people and organizations that should be contacted. The Communications Director should be included in this process so that a crisis response plan can be drafted as a companion to the COOP.

The Election Assistance Commission has a section on [contingency planning](https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/contingency-planning) that may provide value as you develop this effort.

<https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/contingency-planning>

### **3.17 Consider working with consultants or state or federal partners to run a tabletop exercise.**

There are numerous federal, state and local partners that will conduct tabletop exercises with the VRE. For example the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has an entire team that engages in exercises around election security. Additionally there are private parties that will engage in these exercises for fees.

Tabletop exercises are simply adult education exercises designed to meet learning objectives. In the election security environment they are used to establish communication channels between vital partner organizations. For example, you may include your local EMS, County IT, voting vendors, and other stakeholders. Others take tabletop exercises that have been prepared in advance and run them internally with their staff to raise awareness and identify operational gaps.

CISA released a [tabletop in a box](#). The Defending Digital Democracy Program at the Belfer Center at Harvard University also has a [State and Local Election Cybersecurity Playbook](#).

### **3.18 Utilize free security services from the federal government and private sector partners.**

The elections community is being offered a variety of free services from the federal government and private sector. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency offers a wide variety of services. We suggest engaging in Vulnerability Scanning of the public-facing website as soon as feasible. Other services are available [here](#). In addition, private firms like Google and Cloudflare offer free DDOS protection for election websites, and the county should avail themselves of those services.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Create a culture focused on service, transparency, efficiency and security.		Develop a short-term communication plan focused on the November 2020 Election		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
3.1	Create and display visual diagrams illustrating the workflows for all major operations.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.2	Modernize the look and feel of the office to make it more welcoming to voters, staff, and other stakeholders.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.2.1	Design flexible office space that can accommodate multiple purposes.	Long-Term	Medium	\$\$\$\$\$
3.3	Increase Advanced Voting locations and hours to match or surpass neighboring counties and show that DeKalb is the most accessible voting jurisdiction in the state.	Short-Term	High	\$\$\$
3.3.1	Consider coordinating a media strategy with neighboring counties in the metropolitan area for the clarity of messaging it will provide voters.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.4	Rewrite and redesign the website to increase functionality, usability and service.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
3.5	Focus on enhanced communications.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.5.1	Consider direct mail outreach such as pre-election information postcards.	Short-Term	Medium	\$\$\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
3.5.2	Build a social media presence so that DeKalb County is the trusted voice for election information.	Immediate	High	\$
3.6	Create a call center software application to track incoming calls and provide “scripts” to ensure a factual and uniform message to voters.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.7	Commit to creating a customer focused environment.	Immediate	High	None
3.7.1	Ensure that every person hoping for a response gets one, either at the meeting or in writing.	Short-Term	Low	\$
3.7.2	Add a website tool so stakeholders can request information or even make complaints online.	Short-Term	Medium	\$\$
3.7.3	Consider live streaming board meetings and other critical activities such as vote tallying, logic and accuracy testing, mail ballot processing, and the packaging and reviewing of ballots upon return.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.7.4	Build a stakeholder advisory group beyond just partisan leadership of the board and includes others who are extremely engaged.	Long-Term	Low	\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
3.80	Document all standard operating procedures (SOPs) and policies and practices into a single set of documents.	Long-Term	High	\$\$
3.9	Delegate responsibilities and accountability with any new staff the Board of Elections and Board of County Commissioners invest in.	Short-Term	High	None
3.10	Executive leadership must drive more direct reporting from managers and supervisors.	Short-Term	High	None
3.11	All activities managed by the VRE Dept. should be supported by mini-project plans and accompanying calendars that are rolled up to executive leadership.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.12	Commit to streamlining processes as listed elsewhere by assigning the improvement plan to your Project Manager.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.13	Create an election security task force to include office staff, vendors, and strategic internal and external partners.	Short-Term	High	\$
3.14	Utilize the investment in a Chief Operating Officer or Project Manager to work with IT to build a full security assessment and implementation plan.	Short-Term	High	\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
3.15	Commit to annual procedural audits of all processes and evaluation of SOPs	Long-Term	High	\$
3.16	Develop and continue to update a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).	Long-Term	High	\$
3.17	Consider working with consultants or state or federal partners to run a tabletop exercise.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
3.18	Utilize free security services from the federal government and private sector partners.	Immediate	High	\$

# Recommendations

## 4

### Streamline the voter registration process while focusing on quality and transparency

Like many states, the procedures for processing the paper and online voter registration (VR) applications is mainly dictated by the functioning of the statewide voter registration database, eNet. The procedures for adding or updating information from a VR application have been created by the Georgia Secretary of State, along with training and support material. Because of the rigidity in the data entry procedures, it is easy to assume that there is little to be changed at the county level.

During our in-person assessment we were able to walk through and observe the front-end process which provided valuable insight. We applaud the VRE staff for their focus on quality assurance and encourage them to keep that as their top priority. The opportunities for improvement and efficiencies will be found in the actions that are taken before and after the data entry into eNet. Our recommendations focus on those areas as well as ways to support the values of service, transparency, efficiency, and security mentioned in the previous section.



## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### 4.1 Stop printing out and scanning the online voter registration (OLVR) applications.

*4.1.1 Request the OLVR processing procedures from neighboring counties to assess how their procedures compare.*

Printing out the OLVR forms is duplicative. We understand that it is done to maintain processing quotas (250 OLVR per day per clerk), but it is an unnecessary step that is slowing down the process. These applications can be processed quicker if the VRE staff and temps do not have to wait for a manager to print out and batch the forms. The current system would allow those technicians to process the changes inline in the state VR system (eNet).

Assessing the practices in neighboring counties may provide additional ideas on how to shift away from printing paper to process OLVR forms, while still maintaining a high level of quality control.

### 4.2 Empower frontline staff for a more efficient quality control process.

When errors are discovered during quality assurance (QA) checks, the technician describes the error on a slip of paper, and the application is returned to the Voter Registration Manager. The VR Manager is the only one authorized to correct the error, and then the application has to be rescanned and go through the QA and indexing process all over again.

The QA technicians should be empowered to make the corrections as soon as they are identified. This would eliminate extra paperwork and wasted time. The paper application itself is not the problem, so it should not have to be rescanned, but instead reattached to the correct transaction record.

### 4.3 Streamline the “missing information letter” process for efficiency.

Currently, each technician that “checks out” a batch of VR forms (paper or printed from OLVR) must generate their own voter letters when the application has missing information or there is a problem that prevents it from being processed fully. While there is an end-to-end accountability by having the technician process each letter individually, it is a redundant step that comes with an operational cost.

Assembly lines are used for a reason. Reconstruct the process so that “missing information” letters are generated all at the same time each day through eNet. Consider creating a weekly rotation schedule to assign staff the daily batch processing of these letters.

### 4.4 Work with the State to optimize the voter identification (VID) card mailing.

Currently, VID cards are created by the state, shipped to the county, and then mailed out by the county. There is an opportunity to have them mailed directly from the print vendor. Alternatively, have the VID card embedded in mailings from the county that provide other information of value to the voters—dates, deadlines, website and social media address, etc.

### 4.5 Add an email address to the voter registration form and change the law to allow election information to be sent electronically to voters.

Email and mobile phone numbers should be restricted to personal identifying information and used only for election official communications, not to be released in public datasets. Adding an email address to the collection of contact information would enable the VRE to communicate more immediately with voters if there is an issue with their voter registration or ballot application and to alert voters to polling location changes or signature cure issues for absentee ballots.

### 4.6 Increase voter registration outreach virtually, by mail, and in person.

Given the current public health crisis and the expanded use of voting by mail, it is critical that all voters are encouraged to update their voter registration information. This can be accomplished through numerous outreach efforts with an emphasis on utilizing the OLVR application where possible. Additionally, it is important to audit the signatures that voters have on file and, if necessary, conduct a communication to voters encouraging them to update their signature of record.

Start by petitioning the state to provide exports from the VRDB with voter email addresses and phone numbers to support the use of direct digital pitches. Additionally, the savvy use of a new and expanded social media presence will help significantly. Finally, direct mail to all households, not just registered voters, can help fill the gap.

Consider utilizing existing mail sent from other county offices such as the Tax Commission or public utilities. A full-time communications professional will be best positioned to explore all available avenues for getting out messages to voters.

#### **4.7 Design and print voter registration workflow posters for the office to give transparency to visitors and reminders to staff.**

These documents are at the medium detail level but provide visual awareness of every operation the office undergoes. You will see parallel recommendations for all areas of operations in this report. For voter registration, it may start with receipt of paper applications, recording counts in a tracker, batching, data entry, scanning, quality control, and mailing cards. For the VR list maintenance procedures, you would build something parallel but in greater detail.

#### **4.8 Track all voter registration applications by source, date, and method – e.g., over the counter, by mail, or online.**

- 4.8.1 Ask organizations sending in applications by mail to use a return receipt and tracking.*
- 4.8.2 Provide a template for an audit sheet that can be included with their package that includes the total quantity of forms enclosed, who sent the package, and their contact information.*
- 4.8.3 Create a mechanism to alert the third party if the contents differ from the audit sheet.*
- 4.8.4 Provide a receipt to third parties or voters that submit forms over the counter.*
- 4.8.5 Improve communication with voters that their form was received and processed. This is usually done by mailing voter registration cards but if email addresses are provided that method should be prioritized too.*
- 4.8.6 Create a 48-hour turnaround standard for all VR processing. Eventually, move this to 24-hour.*

It is important to have an accepted methodology for receiving documents. With respect to online voter registration applications it is fairly simple. It is more difficult with documents that come in by mail or are physically turned over to staff by customers at the

counter. We make parallel recommendations in section 5.1 dealing with applications for mail ballots.

Communicating a clear process and expectations to individuals and organizations, and taking actions such as providing a receipt to the organization, can prove you have an accepted methodology for receiving and processing documents. This helps in disputes, providing evidence that a particular transaction did or did not occur. Strong record keeping helps the organization.

#### **4.9 Work with the Secretary of State to improve how voter information is displayed on the MVP page.**

Voters should be encouraged to utilize the MVP page to confirm their registration information in advance of receiving their VR card. When we reviewed the voter view of the MVP page, we noticed some issues that likely create confusion for voters. The MVP page presents an opportunity to display information immediately to voters who may wonder the status of the voter registration application, information about their mail ballot, or other relevant voter information. Some simple changes would reduce voter confusion and improve customer service. (See 5.3 for more detail.)

#### **4.10 Document and review behavioral analytics for voter registration applications.**

Routine work happens in routine order and quantities. Tracking daily statistics for new voter registrations and updates helps identify potential issues because bad behavior generally may not comply with general order. Understanding normal business quantities and setting targets and benchmarks will help quickly identify anomalous behavior.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Streamline the voter registration process while focusing on quality and transparency.		Identify process and quality control tracking that can be implemented immediately		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
4.1	Stop printing out and scanning the online voter registration (OLVR) applications.	Immediate	Medium	None
4.1.1	Request the OLVR processing procedures from neighboring counties to assess how their procedures compare.	Short-Term	Medium	None
4.2	Empower frontline staff for a more efficient quality control process.	Immediate	High	None
4.3	Streamline the “missing information letter” process for efficiency.	Immediate	Medium	None
4.4	Work with the State to optimize the voter identification (VID) card mailing.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
4.5	Add an email address to the voter registration form and change the law to allow election information to be sent to voters electronically.	Long-Term	High	\$
4.6	Increase voter registration outreach virtually, by mail, and in person.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
4.7	Design and print voter registration workflow posters for the office to give transparency to visitors and reminders to staff.	Short-Term	High	\$
4.8	Track all voter registration applications by source, date, and method.	Immediate	High	\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
4.8.1	Ask organizations sending in applications by mail to use a return receipt and tracking.	Immediate	Medium	None
4.8.2	Provide a template for an audit sheet that can be included with the package that includes the total quantity of forms enclosed, who sent the package, and their contact information.	Immediate	Medium	None
4.8.3	Create a mechanism to alert the third party if the contents differ from the audit sheet.	Immediate	Medium	\$
4.8.4	Provide a receipt to third parties or voters that submit forms over the counter.	Immediate	High	None
4.8.5	Improve communication with voters that their form was received and processed.	Short-Term	High	\$
4.8.6	Create a 48-hour turnaround standard for all VR processing.	Short-Term	High	\$
4.9	Work with the SOS to improve how voter information is displayed on the MVP page.	Short-Term	High	None
4.10	Document and review behavioral analytics for voter registration applications.	Long-Term	Medium	\$

# Recommendations

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## 5 Create a modern, lean vote-by-mail program

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Absentee voting or voting by mail, has grown steadily for the past two decades. In some states it has matured into the primary form of receiving and casting a ballot and is referred to as “voting at home”. In this section of our assessment, we will refer to the process of submitting an absentee ballot application, preparing and sending ballot packets to voters, and receiving and processing returned ballots as the “vote-by-mail” process or VBM. The recommendations for changes and improvement focus not only on industry best practices but also take into account the current COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the VBM process for future elections in DeKalb County.

Compared to other jurisdictions, the size and means of the DeKalb County VRE Dept. mail voting infrastructure is underwhelming and there are opportunities to make the process leaner. Much of this is a function of the historically low proportion of mail ballots and not of management failures. However, the lack of efficient practices and infrastructure to meet the coming changes will hinder the excellent and timely administration of the program in the future.

There are opportunities for quick improvements for the November 2020 Elections, but it will take some capital investment now. We suggest collaborating with funders and other stakeholders as soon as possible to begin investing and raising awareness of the immediate and future needs.

Note that the capital investment recommendations were first envisioned as a long-term investment, but with the public health exigencies facing the organization, serious consideration should be given to taking immediate action now ahead of the November election. A mail ballot sorter for example is likely critical to the efficient and accurate processing of return mail.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Feedback from our stakeholder assessments indicates a lag between the time applications are received and the time outbound ballots are mailed.<sup>1</sup> In addition, some voters are submitting an application more than once, which suggests there is an opportunity to provide direct feedback to voters that the application has been received and a ballot will be mailed. Further, there are likely a high percentage of incoming calls into the DeKalb County VRE asking about the status of the mail ballot request. This would indicate that improving efficiencies within the application processing scheme would immediately improve customer service operations.

### 5.1 Create a system for tracking applications that are received, verifying receipt, timely processing, and quick and meaningful outreach to voters when there is a problem with the submitted application that needs to be corrected.

While the paper (or fillable PDF) absentee application itself is inefficient and a poor use of resources, we recognize that it is the law. We also understand there may be some changes to how the form is administered for 2020 elections. With the likely expansion of voting by mail this year, accompanied by a massive increase in data entry of absentee applications, and potential limitations for in-person voting, it is imperative the applications are processed quickly to ensure the timely delivery of ballots. We recommend setting a standard for processing applications within 24-48 hours.

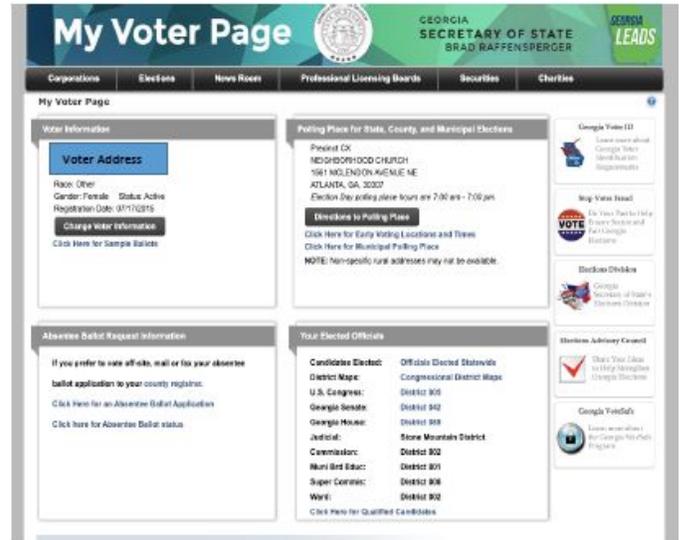
### 5.2 Work with the Secretary of State to implement an accessible online absentee application.

Building an online absentee request process will speed up the receipt and processing of requests. We understand this may take a policy change but it is an important enhancement that will improve the customer process and we recommend that the VRE take immediate steps to move this forward.

### 5.3 Improvements to the Secretary of State 'My Voter Page' (MVP).

We recommend working with the Secretary of State to make some specific changes to the MVP page. These changes will improve voter's ability to consume their own

information about the status of their application and ballot.



On the MVP Page as shown above, we recommend:

1. Add 'Address where my ballot will be mailed' or 'Official Mailing Address' on the display so that voters can confirm the address that in some cases may be different from the residential address.
2. When you select 'click here for absentee ballot status' as below. It is very difficult to see that there is a scroll down option. This may create confusion.
3. Review the rest of the page and compare customer calls to see if other improvements should be made.
4. These two screenshots may also create confusion:



<sup>1</sup> DeKalb represents 7.7% of active registered voters in the state but accounted for 22% of the voter issues reported to the voter protection hotline. 72% of the DeKalb issues reported were VBM related including processing errors, slow processing times and lost applications and ballots.

5. In this second screenshot, the application was submitted via email on April 15 (shot shows May 6). Ballot says it was issued on May 6 which may be the date the file was sent to the vendor. The voter didn't actually receive their ballot until May 14. Voters who rely on the data in MVP for VBM this cycle have likely been thinking the ballot was mailed sooner than it was. This is because there is a difference between the 'Date Issue' and 'Date Sent.' We recommend working with the Secretary of State to adjust how this is displayed to a voter in the following way:

**Absentee Ballot Request Received:** 5/6/2020 (Date the absentee application was received to abide by 48 hour turnaround)

**Absentee Ballot In Process:** 5/6/2020 (Date file is sent to the vendor)

**Absentee Ballot Mailed:** 5/14/2020 (Date the ballot is actually mailed via USPS)

**Absentee Ballot Received by Election Official:**  
(Received is usually different than accepted)

**Absentee Ballot Accepted:** (Accepted is signature accepted). If there is a discrepancy, it should display it so the voter knows right away.

#### 5.4 Build a more efficient workflow for processing absentee ballot applications and incorporate the absentee ballot application process with the voter registration process.

The process should focus on:

- Revising the incoming absentee application process.
- Setting data entry standards and expectations.
- Revising the existing data entry process.
- Implementing a quality control process.

The process should be built with the expectation that applications will be processed within 48 hours of actual receipt. Processes should be examined for efficiencies and staffing should be increased to meet that service goal.

There are opportunities to be more efficient, for example, the practice of "marrying" the mail ballot applications with the outbound ballot packaging prior to mailing should be discontinued. There are significant operational costs to this practice without anything near commensurate value. Based on our in-person observation of application processing, a review of the workflow documentation, and review of the official absentee ballot application, we envision a more efficient process.

#### 5.5 Create a facility designed for the vote-by-mail process.

Redesign the space and facility for the vote-by-mail processing function. Right now, the space is inadequate to process a high-volume of applications, prepare mail ballots, and ensure accountability and transparency. As the use of vote-by-mail increases, an investment in right-sizing technology and physical space should be made. This is particularly true as the VRE considers making the process more transparent for the public.

#### 5.6 Institute a tiered system for signature review to ensure that a voter's signature is not rejected on a single pass.

Signature verification is required both for the absentee application as well as the returned ballot. Incorporating signature verification training and adopting a tiered system of review ensures that a voter's signature is not rejected on a single pass. By incorporating multiple layers of review, you create a system that promotes transparency and integrity of the process.

Incorporating automatic signature verification (ASV) software, which we recommend as part of the investment in ballot sorting equipment, should be part of the tiered review approach. Using ASV can be considered the first tier in the review process. Essentially, the software is looking for the image from the envelope and the image from the voter registration system to be a near-perfect match.

The second tier of review, on ballots that did not match using ASV, should always be performed by human inspection. Reviewers take a closer look at the source image and the reference image and use techniques to make a decision about whether or not the signature is accepted or rejected. The review time for this process usually averages about 30 seconds per signature.

This final tier of review, for ballots that did not match in either ASV or Tier 2, requires closer inspection and looking deeper into the voter record for older signatures or other sources of evidence. Because the signature will be in a final rejection status after this tier of review (unless the voter meets the criteria for curing the discrepancy) it is important to have a bipartisan team make the decision together. This level of review is more painstaking and can take up to 3 minutes per signature.

Finally, it is critical to create baseline standards and expectations for staff conducting signature review. It is important to train staff, review and audit work with random audits, assess rejection and acceptance rates of each bi-partisan team to ensure that all staff are following procedures and protocols, and monitor and compare to standards.

## 5.7 Create a training program for signature verification.

### 5.7.1 Include a "signature comparison chart" to help participants and observers follow a standard pattern of review.

States that vote primarily by mail have developed signature verification training programs that can be adapted to the requirements in Georgia. Two comprehensive training programs to model come from the [Colorado](#) and [Oregon](#) Secretaries of State.



## 5.8 Create a transparent and accountable process for the delivery of absentee ballot applications to the VRE Office from a third party group.

- 5.8.1 Ask organizations sending in applications by mail to use a return receipt and tracking.
- 5.8.2 Provide a template for an audit sheet that can be included with their package that includes the total quantity of forms enclosed, who sent the package, and contact information.
- 5.8.3 Create a mechanism to alert the third party if the contents differs from the audit sheet.
- 5.8.4 Provide a receipt to third parties or voters that submit forms over the counter.
- 5.8.5 Ballot tracking software used in conjunction with a barcode on absentee applications.
- 5.8.6 Improve communication with voters that their form was received and processed. This is especially important for voters that submit an application early and might not see their ballot for weeks.

An ideal process is one where both parties have a clear understanding of the actions required and confirmation that they were carried out correctly. There is opportunity to improve the intake process for absentee ballot applications as well as the application itself.

These documents should detail how things "should" be handled when applications are handed to VRE staff over the counter and when they are being delivered and received by mail. This could be done in the form of an FAQ or otherwise. The goal is a process document to help ensure organizations are protecting themselves and the voters whose information they collected.

## 5.9 Build a data tracking tool to account for the aggregate daily intake of absentee applications and ballots sent out.

This can be done with some intermediate skills using an Excel spreadsheet. The key is to measure daily intake, document the source of the application, and track data entry performance so that you can adjust staffing levels accordingly. At a minimum it should show:

- How many applications are received at the front desk each day.
- The source of the applications (mail, hand delivered by a voter, received from a third party group, etc).
- The disposition of those forms - accepted or rejected.

## 5.10 Invest in modern outbound ballot preparation.

### 5.10.1 Invest in ballot on demand printers if contracting with a professional mail ballot print vendor is not feasible.

Given COVID-19, it is foreseeable that absentee ballot requests could increase significantly. In that event, there are two options. The first, is to find an outside mail ballot printer to accommodate this process as a service. It is our understanding that the Secretary of State just implemented a contract with a professional vendor for the upcoming primary to alleviate stress off of the counties. We advise that the VRE work with the Secretary of State's office to make this program permanent or at least utilize it for November. If that is not feasible, we advise the VRE Dept. to contract with a print and mail ballot vendor for future elections.

The second option, and one to consider for the future, is for the VRE, in coordination with DeKalb County Government, to procure the necessary equipment to accommodate the volume internally. This includes building out a large printing and mailing operation with a large scale printer capable of printing the Dominion ballots, and an inline envelope inserter, and other mail preparation equipment. We advise the VRE to review printing and mailing capacity with the county as a whole. There may be opportunities for the county to invest in

printing and mailing operations beyond mail ballots to cover all other county mailings. [Orange County, California](#) set-up a printing and mailing operation for ballots and now that same operation provides printing and mailing services for the entire county. It should be noted that such an operation could be run at the state or regionalized level. Thus, our recommendation is to review the printing and mailing operation as a service and within DeKalb but also with a broader perspective.

Even after COVID-19 subsides, we expect natural growth in voting by mail, and thus, the printing and mailing operation needs to be scaled.

- If possible, contract with a mail ballot print vendor. This is the same as what the Secretary of State is doing now for the upcoming primary.
- Set-up an in-house process to respond to absentee requests quickly and on demand. This includes purchasing additional ballot on-demand printers.
- If preprinting is required, the ballot picking room should be outfitted with appropriate shelving to increase efficiency and security.
- Reimagine the ballot printing and stuffing process, with a focus on logging the activities by batch to ensure consistency, accountability, and ballot control.

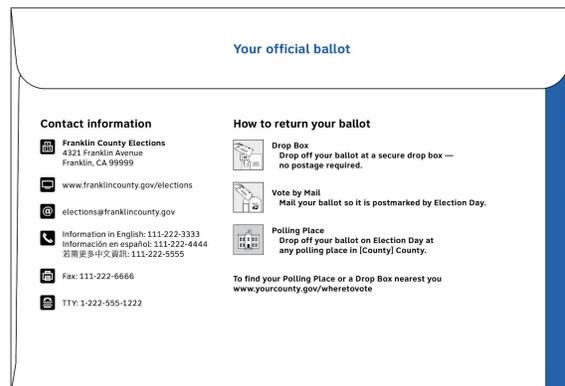
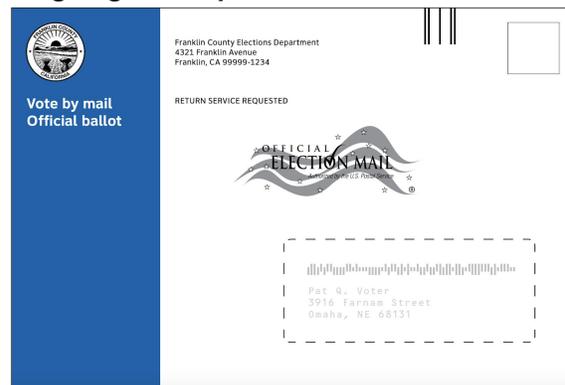
**5.11 Sign up with the USPS to use the intelligent mail barcode (IMB) service for outgoing and return mail ballot envelopes in conjunction with Informed Visibility Mail Tracking and Reporting .**

- This can be implemented with an outside ballot printing vendor.
- This can also be implemented in-office and on demand.

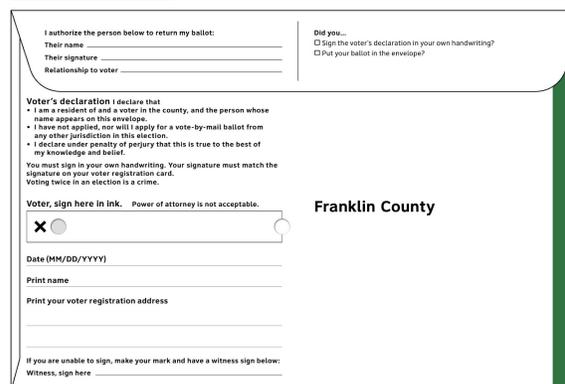
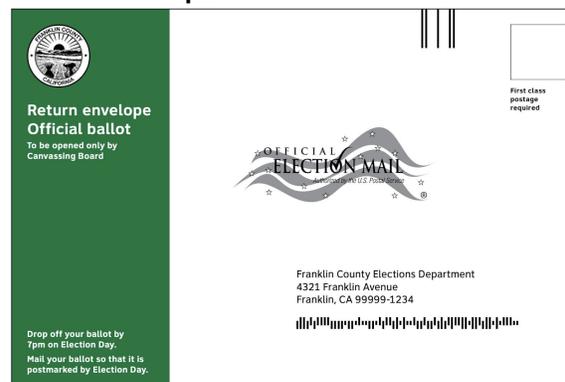
**5.12 Redesign the mail ballot packet including the outgoing envelopes, return envelopes, and voter instructions.**

Consider using the template from the [Center for Civic Design](#). Having an easy to use mail ballot envelope, coupled with an informational insert in the envelope will drive the number of unsigned and late ballots. Examples of user-friendly envelopes:

**Outgoing Envelope:**



**Return Envelope:**



### **5.13 Create a voter outreach campaign to ensure voter registration information is current, including their address and signature.**

*5.13.1 Consider sending an outreach email to all voters with an email address on file asking them to update their address online and download and mail in vote-by-mail applications.*

*5.13.2 You could also send a household mailing to all eligible electors with voter registration information and information about how to vote.*

*5.13.3 This communication should have three actions:*

- *Check your registration and address.*
- *Outline voting options including vote-by-mail.*
- *Provide a sample ballot.*

### **5.14 Implement a Ballot Tracking System.**

The notification of application acceptance, ballot mailing, and ballot acceptance, will reduce calls and increase confidence in the election process. An example of a tool that can be utilized is [Ballot Scout](#). We also made recommendations for the data elements displayed on the MVP page in 5.3.

### **5.15 Include a barcode on the return ballot envelope to expedite the process for accepting returned ballots.**

This will improve the efficiency for ballot processing. If using a commercial provider, using an intelligent mail barcode should be required. To produce the IMB internally for on-demand absentee requests, you will need to ensure you have the correct systems. The equipment and supplies that will need to be purchased include:

1. Work with the mail ballot print vendor to have voter ID converted to barcode and printed on envelopes.
2. If printing in house, barcode software can create a voter ID barcode to be printed on the label

These recommendations should be implemented before applications and ballots are mailed out. This includes making arrangements with your mail ballot print vendor for purchasing, installing, and testing the barcode labeling software.

### **5.16 Procure and operationalize a high-speed ballot envelope sorter.**

*5.16.1 Purchase an automatic envelope slicer/opener if a high-speed ballot sorter is not purchased.*

Investing in this technology will dramatically decrease the processing time and the number of people needed to staff this stage of the inbound ballot process. Given the expected growth in vote-by-mail, due to behavior or now foreseeable health circumstances, it is possible that by November 2020, labor savings alone will achieve the needed return on financial investment.

Procuring new technology on this deadline is difficult but possible. Partner with necessary government purchasing agencies inside your government to move quickly. The VRE Dept. may also determine whether it participates in a cooperative purchasing alliance, or can take advantage of a [cooperative contract](#). A similar option would be the [GSA Cooperative Purchasing Program](#). Given the circumstances, purchasing departments may have additional flexibility.

Meet as soon as possible with your government partners as you seek to modify existing contracts and negotiate new contracts. Define the specifications you will need in new product or vendor relationships. In bounds of your purchasing requirements, work with your vendors as soon as possible.

### **5.17 Invest in additional high-speed ballot scanning technology.**

Given the expected growth in vote by mail and the volatility due to COVID 19, ensuring the capacity to timely tally and report results will be important. The Dominion system supports desktop scanners with fairly high throughput, and they should suffice if operations are efficient but the VRE should evaluate volume during the June Primary.

### **5.18 Retrofit and redesign the mail operation center, with appropriate physical support structures and security controls.**

From a physical perspective, there is simply not an appropriate set of shelving and lockers, transportation cages, and the like to handle expected growth. Concerning security, we redundantly note that controls like ID scanners, cameras, etc., need improvement. The current keyed entry systems no longer suffice. ID card scanners and cameras should be implemented. And the corollary audits of those controls should be implemented as well.

### **5.19 Design an appropriate plan for processing returned mail ballots.**

A returned mail ballot processing plan should include everything that takes place from the time ballots are delivered to the county facility until they are sealed in storage containers for permanent retention. The current documentation for processing returned mail ballots is sparse and falls short of an operations plan for a county the size of DeKalb. Our guess is that the process must rely on institutional knowledge for the setup, processing, and accounting of ballots.

One of the most crucial, but often overlooked elements, in the returned mail ballot process is creating a system for tracking the transfer of ballots as they move through each stage of the process. This can be as simple as a paper tracking sheet or a fully automated inventory management type system. We recommend that creating such a system become a priority in designing the new process.

We recommend creating a plan that identifies the space, supplies, personnel, and tasks required for the following ballot processing areas:

- Ballot retrieval
- Ballot receiving
- Ballot verification and curing
- Ballot preparation
- Ballot scanning and counting
- Ballot duplication
- Ballot adjudication
- Results and reporting
- Post-election audits

### **5.20 Prepare an efficient system for voters to cure deficiencies with their returned ballots.**

A successful signature cure process has a number of components. "Curing" should be done daily by sending a letter via post and email, along with a blank affidavit describing exactly how they can "cure" the situation and have their ballot counted. This likely means the voter must sign the affidavit and mail, or email, it back with a copy of some form of valid identification. Using both a letter and an email is best practice, for delivery and receipt. If you can phone the voter that is advisable as well. A Ballot Tracking system, referenced in 5.14, would also provide immediate notification to voters who need to cure. Additionally, other technical platforms exist to streamline the cure process.

Once the affidavit is received, workers match them to the challenged ballot. The affidavit coupled with the ID is presumptive evidence weighing heavily in the voter's favor. Assuming the signatures match when comparing all reference images in the record, and ID requirements are met, these ballots should be accepted for counting. Doing this at scale is difficult. Consider particularly doing the following:

- Automate the system for sending out cure letters and affidavits and tracking which ones have been returned. The VREs current method is highly manual and segmented and will benefit from our specific recommendations above.
- Resolve the cure the affidavit is returned and notify the voters again of the status. This notification is also streamlined if you have a ballot tracking system outlined in 5.14 and if the MVP is clear as to ballot status.

Be prepared to inform the voters and general public about a voter's ability to cast a ballot in person if the ballot was rejected because of a signature discrepancy. Some questions you may want to answer in advance are whether that voter will be required to vote a provisional ballot if they show up to vote in person? Be sure to inform them that a rejection of the mail ballot means their provisional ballots will be accepted automatically. Assuming that is the case.

### **5.21 Design a Voter Education Campaign about Mail-in Voting.**

Work with the Communications team to design a marketing campaign about mail-in voting. Nevada designed this [website](#) to educate the public about this method of voting.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Create a modern, lean vote-by-mail program		Identify process and quality control tracking that can be implemented immediately		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
5.1	Create a system for tracking applications that are received, verifying receipt, timely processing, and quick and meaningful outreach to voters when there is a problem.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.2	Work with the secretary of state to implement an accessible online absentee application.	Long-Term	High	\$
5.3	Improvements to MVP page.	Short-Term	High	None
5.4	Build a more efficient workflow for processing absentee ballot applications and incorporate the absentee ballot application process with the voter registration process.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
5.5	Create a facility designed for the vote-by-mail process.	Long-Term	Medium	\$\$\$
5.6	Institute a tiered system for signature review to ensure that a voter's signature is not rejected on a single pass.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.7	Create a training program for signature verification.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.7.1	Include a "signature comparison chart" to help participants and observers follow a standard pattern of review.	Short-term	High	\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
5.8	Create a transparent and accountable process for the delivery of absentee applications to the VRE Office from a third party group.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.9	Build a data tracking tool to account for the aggregate daily intake of absentee applications and ballots sent out.	Immediate	High	\$
5.10	Invest in modern outbound ballot preparation.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
5.10.1	Invest in ballot on demand printers if contracting with a professional mail ballot print vendor is not feasible.	Long-Term	Medium	\$\$
5.11	Sign up with the USPS to use the intelligent mail barcode (IMB) service for outgoing and return mail ballot envelopes.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.12	Redesign the mail ballot packet including the outgoing envelopes, return envelopes, and voter instructions.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.13	Create a voter outreach campaign to ensure voter registration information is current, including their address and signature.	Short-Term	High	\$\$

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
5.14	Implement a Ballot Tracking System.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
5.15	Include a barcode on the return ballot envelope to expedite the process for accepting returned ballots.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.16	Procure and operationalize a high-speed ballot envelope sorter.	Short-Term	High	\$\$\$
5.16.1	Purchase an automatic envelope slicer/opener if a high-speed ballot sorter is not purchased.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
5.17	Invest in additional high-speed ballot scanning technology.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
5.18	Retrofit and redesign your critical mail operation center, with appropriate physical support structures and security controls.	Long-Term	High	\$\$\$
5.19	Design an appropriate plan for processing returned mail ballots.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
5.20	Prepare an efficient system for voters to cure deficiencies with their returned ballots.	Short-Term	High	\$
5.21	Design a Voter Education Campaign about Mail-in Voting.	Short-Term	High	\$\$

# Recommendations

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## 6 Voting system rollout improvement plan

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Rolling out a new voting system can be challenging. Some of those challenges were decreased thanks to the significant role the state had in the VREs rollout of their new voting system. The VRE Dept. was relieved of many of the normal obligations that come with a new system rollout, including acceptance testing of equipment, form design and creating training materials. On the other hand, they did not have the opportunity to ensure that those programs were designed most effectively.

Despite the state's dominant role, there are various recommendations that apply to the VRE in areas affecting the voting system rollout. At the time of our onsite visit, training, public outreach, Advanced Voting and Election Day logic and accuracy testing were all underway. Our plan was to return on Election Day to conduct a real time assessment of the voting system implementation. Ultimately, the primary election was modified since our initial visit, and we were unable to return in person due to COVID-19 to complete that part of the assessment. We were also unable to attain any documentation around plans for staffing and resource allocation.

Following in this section are general recommendations that we advise the VRE to undertake given our experience with installations in the past.

- Planning for new voting system implementation
- Implementation timeline
- Recommendations for policies and procedures
- Plans for staffing and training
- Plans for voter education and outreach, including the how, when and where of voting



## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### 6.1 Assign a project manager to lead the voting system implementation and accompanying timeline.

- 6.1.1 *Assign a project manager to be the organizational lead & assign the PM be the primary Point of Contact with the State and the Vendor.*
- 6.1.2 *Have the project manager maintain the master calendar for all rollout related issues including acceptance testing, internal training, logic and accuracy testing, election day support, voter education and outreach.*
- 6.1.3 *Have the project manager run all implementation meetings, working with subject matter experts and leadership as much as possible to ensure cross sector understanding of dependencies.*
- 6.1.4 *Have the project manager lay out the entire timeline and accompanying deliverables, milestones, and dependencies to ensure successful deployment.*

The voting system generally is only a smaller portion of time commitment in an elections office. All of the other requirements to maintain the voter lists, process candidates, recruit and place poll workers, find voting locations, etc., take tremendous time. Those efforts go on regardless of which voting system is deployed.

Those efforts also need oversight and management at the operational and senior levels. Each of those managers surely interface with the voting system, but none can afford to make it their singular effort. This is where the project manager we recommended will prove valuable. Allowing change to happen while ensuring the organization makes no service sacrifices in other areas.

### 6.2 Consider the health implications of each polling place layout when making decisions about where ballot marking devices and scanners will be located.

In addition to social distancing, you can reengineer the layout and operation to help isolate workers and voters from COVID-19. Locations will vary but general layout guidance includes:

- Voter check-in tables with 6-foot distancing between poll workers can leave less space for voting machines.
- Provide templates showing workers where to set up voting equipment, making sure each device is at least 6 feet apart.
- Have a plan ahead of time and include it in poll worker training.
- Provide supplies such as painter's tape and chalk for workers to designate where voters should stand.
- Consider using visual simulation models, such as the [University of Rhode Island's \(URI\) Votes Tools](#), to lay out voting locations and design line strategies that help enforce appropriate social distancing.

### 6.3 Work with the voting system vendor on proper equipment cleaning protocols.

While there is a [list of Environment Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) approved disinfectants that are effective against COVID-19 you must consult your voting equipment vendor before approving any for use on voting equipment, electronic poll books or other polling place technologies. [The vendors have posted updated information at the EAC website](#). Using approved methods, poll workers should clean equipment in full view of voters so they can see that it is being done.

#### 6.4 Plan for voter education and outreach, including the how, when and where of voting.

In the current environment, with a new voting system and a global health pandemic, successfully communicating with voters is absolutely critical. For this section we suggest communication directed towards the voting system itself and not the pandemic.

Because mail voting is likely to be such a huge proportion of your count, ensuring that your communications in this area are as good as possible is critical to serving your voters.

We note again in this next section that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) created a Joint COVID Working Group for elections. The group provided significant documents on things to consider while administering and securing election infrastructure during this pandemic. Please review those at the CISA website: <https://www.cisa.gov/covid-19-and-elections>. We highlight suggestions from that document but recommend you review it all.

We suggest having answers to these questions in a prominent place on the website, that you push them out regularly through your social media, and that you partner with stakeholder and constituent groups to ensure this permeates the community.

*How voters ensure they receive a mail ballot.*

- *How can I verify/update my voter registration information?*
- *How do I request a ballot? By when?*
- *When will ballots be mailed?*
- *If I didn't get my ballot, can I get a new one?*
- *Can I vote in person?*

*How voters mark and return their ballots.*

- *How do I complete the ballot?*
- *Pen or Pencil? Color?*
- *What if I goof up?*
- *When must I return the ballot?*
- *Do I pay postage?*
- *Can I deliver it somewhere? Where can I return my ballot if I do not mail it? Can someone else return my voted ballot for me?*

#### 6.5 State issued policies and procedures

Our understanding is that most of the policies and procedures used by the VRE Dept. come from the state. Deficiencies in those, or opportunities for enhancement, are difficult to assess without seeing more in practice. We certainly saw opportunities for more detailed logic and accuracy checklists and better designed ballot reconciliation forms. We would encourage the state to work with groups like the Center for Civic Design and review their best practices for form design..

#### 6.6 Poll worker training should be designed around a hands-on, participatory model.

Effective poll worker training is similar to teaching someone how to bake a loaf of bread.

- Explain the rules.
- Provide a step-by-step recipe to follow.
- Demonstrate how the equipment works.
- Allow the new cook to try it with your assistance.
- Quietly observe while they bake on their own.

This can be accomplished in the following manner.

1. Explain the rules by building short videos that cover the legal and policy guidelines. These can be watched by poll workers prior to class. It minimizes the amount of time you spend lecturing and provides them something to go back and watch on their own if they need a refresher. Starting the teaching session with a class discussion or oral quiz is a one way to make sure everyone watched the videos.
2. Provide simple, visual, step-by-step instructions that describe the task, not the equipment or the form. For help getting started see the Center for Civic Design's field guide, "[Vol. 4: Effective Poll Worker Materials](#)" along with the material on "[Making Great Polling Place Materials](#)". The Center for Technology and Civic Life helps election offices with poll worker training and offers training on [poll worker management best practices](#).
3. Break each section of training down into small modules that are an equal mix of discussion, demonstration, and guided hands-on practice. Consider pausing after each section to ask for feedback - What did we do well and where can we make improvements?

5. Provide an Election Day simulation that allows for poll workers to work through a number of scenarios unassisted. Ideally you want to provide the same equipment and supplies that they will have during Advanced Voting and Election Day. Allowing the trainer to observe, rather than lecture, provides immediate feedback on any areas that might need clarification or additional instruction.
6. Finally, make room for plenty of breaks! Trying to cram as much information as you can into a specified period of time is not effective teaching.

**We would be remiss not to mention considerations for training in a COVID-19 environment.**

Hands-on/simulation style training may not be compatible with social distancing. You also need to consider that there will be many first-time poll workers, or poll workers that are being asked to fill in at the last minute. Providing high-quality training should still be the goal but doing it in a way that puts health and safety first. We suggest offering as many virtual training opportunities as possible. Here is an example of a poll worker training video from the South Carolina Board of Elections:

<https://www.scvotes.org/poll-worker-training-videos>

- Consider recorded lectures that simulate the hands-on opportunities poll workers get when they are present and equipment is provided.
- Consider available online training technology that simulates using the equipment.
- When in-person training is required, make the class as small as possible. Let the workers know in advance if you have safety requirements and if they should bring their own protective mask and gloves.
- Consider training workers in a space that allows them to touch the equipment one person at a time, or have small groups where the equipment is spaced adequately.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Voting system rollout improvement plan		Conduct review of June 9th voting system roll out		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
6.1	Assign a project manager to lead the voting system implementation and accompanying timeline.	Short-Term	Medium	\$\$
6.2	Consider the health implications of each polling place layout when making decisions about where ballot marking devices and scanners will be located.	Short-Term	High	\$
6.3	Work with the voting system vendor on proper equipment cleaning protocols.	Short-Term	Low	\$
6.4	Plan for voter education and outreach, including the how, when and where of voting.	Short-Term	High	\$\$\$
6.6	Poll worker training should be designed around a hands-on, participatory model.	Long-Term	High	\$\$

# Recommendations

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## 7 Build resiliency into Advanced Voting and Election Day plans

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There is little question that in the short run, perhaps through next year, Advanced Voting and Election Day voting will be impacted by COVID-19. Voter demand, and availability of sites and workers will combine to make management of elections much more difficult. More mail voting or expanding Advanced Voting may decrease the need to maintain the same number of voting locations and poll workers previously required on Election Day. These offsets in voting behavior could lessen the impacts that COVID-19 has on availability of poll workers or voting locations.

However, reducing the number of locations can have dramatic effects on voter access, lines and congestion, and should be done with extreme caution. Please assess any changes by comparing what you expect the demand for in-person voting to be in relation to prior presidential elections. The policy decisions made at the state level will impact you and we suggest advocating for decisions as early as possible so that you have time to administer changes.

If you do decide to reduce your Election Day footprint, by combining voting locations or otherwise, understand that some locations will be affected by disproportionately longer lines. Even with expanded mail voting and advanced voting options, it may be difficult to predict which sites will generate lines because voters' use of the other options for casting a ballot will likely be spread unevenly. Some communities within jurisdictions have historical preferences for particular methods of voting and those should be analyzed and accounted for. We encourage you to engage community and stakeholder organizations while managing the COVID-19 crisis, to ensure there are no disparate impacts within your county.

Note that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) created a Joint COVID Working Group for elections. The group provided significant documents on things to consider while administering and securing election infrastructure during this pandemic. Please review those at the CISA website: <https://www.cisa.gov/covid-19-and-elections>.

Whatever the size of the operation, there are opportunities to get a better handle on what is occurring around the county during the voting period. The Board should invest in an Election Day management system like many other jurisdictions the size and means of the DeKalb County VRE has. The lack of efficient record keeping and issue tracking practices and accompanying infrastructure, limits the ability of the VRE Dept. to meet the coming changes and will hinder the excellent and timely administration of the program in the future.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### 7.1 Buy or build an election ticketing system to alert the VRE team to issues during Advanced Voting and on Election Day.

Elections are increasingly framed in military terms, especially in the post-2016 environment. Building infrastructure to support your leadership and troops in the field is critical. Paper sheets no longer cut it. There are plenty of vendors that supply products in the arena. Knowink has a product that embeds in the epollbook, and hopefully, you can make use of it. We've seen it mature the Election Day command centers of other similarly sized jurisdictions. This allows teams to know how best to respond and know when an issue has been resolved.

### 7.2 Outfit field teams and technicians with smart devices such as tablets or smartphones so they have a full picture of the problem as soon as they walk into a voting location and can close out issues in the ticketing system on-site.

This will allow real issues needing fast service to filter to the top. There is likely to be a marginal cost difference between renting and servicing these devices. It is critically important that major issues do not get lost because minor or settled issues clog up the ticketing system. If you are unable to provide this to all field reps, then consider at least allowing the techs to have the rights to this.

### 7.3 Utilize a call center ticketing system for operations prior to Election Day to build internal proficiency.

If you want to consider a free, or backup ticketing system, Cook County, Illinois offers its home-built system for free. They do not support it but it works well. It may be worth exploring and having in case the primary system has a problem. Here is a video of how it works.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIETImL1bcY>

### 7.3.2 Consider building your election hotlines infrastructure in partnership with other county operations.

Other election officials have successfully used county emergency management and 311 infrastructure to assist them in managing their voter and back office support needs. It may be worth at least testing whether such a partnership is viable because the county has already invested in the infrastructure.

For example, the City and County of Denver uses a system called WebEOC for operational support and the elections department utilized that infrastructure hotline:

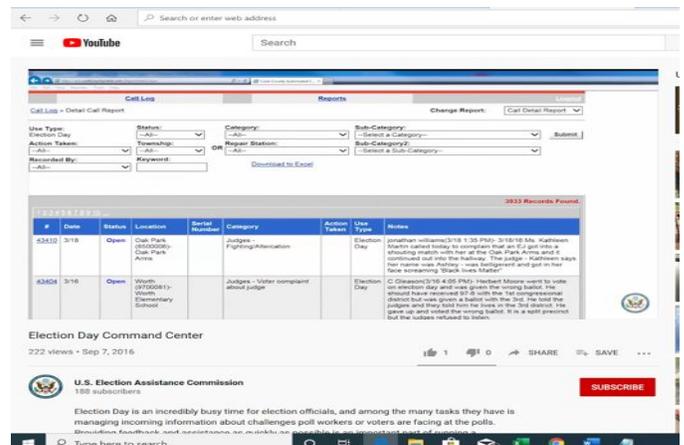
<https://www.juvare.com/webeoc/>

It provides field tracking and is available and in use in many jurisdictions across the US for emergency management. Denver Elections also uses the city's 311 system for customer calls.

### 7.4 Build a cheat sheet that can be used by staff at the front counter, by poll workers at the voting location, or in the call center based on the most frequently asked questions from prior elections.

Without a decision tree or knowledge base built into the ticketing system, it will be important to have the most common problems/solutions at the fingertips of phone operators and those in public facing roles. While the poll worker manual is quite long, this cheat sheet should be no more than a couple of pages.

"Hot Tips" are valuable for fixing most issues. These can also be the outline of a video series that you build and provide over YouTube to your judges as a training supplement.



### **7.5 Have poll workers set up the epollbooks on Monday night and reseal them.**

This will give you centralized aggregate information that things are working as expected or conversely, give you early warning of issues, localized or systemic.

We do not believe there is anything that would prohibit this and accidental check-ins should be able to be restricted or monitored centrally. This can cause some work for the vendor given that Early Voting will also be going simultaneously in at least some sites. There is nothing more confidence-building than getting signals from all your polling places that the infrastructure is up and running. It will also build muscle memory for the poll workers and should ease the morning issues that can arise simply from unfamiliarity. Finally, should there be a problem, knowing earlier is better.

### **7.6 Create a public schedule of events to set expectations for the public and the media.**

You may want to publicize anticipated schedules for when the vote by mail processes, loading of early voting and mail voting memory cards, and election night reporting releases will take place.

For example, the published schedule might look something like this.

- The first report of mail and early votes will be released to the public around 7:30 p.m.
- Precincts are anticipated to start delivery of their results around 8:00 p.m.
- We should begin publishing precinct results around 8:30 p.m. and will try to do so in 20-minute increments until finished
- We anticipate having 95 percent of the precincts reporting by 10:30 or 11:00 p.m.

### **7.7 Livestream your tally room to give full visibility on the results aggregation process from when poll workers drop off materials to when the data is dropped to the State's election night reporting (ENR) system.**

### **7.8 Build and post a process workflow chart for the tally room similar to the workflows posted for other areas of ballot processing.**

This follows the recommendation provided in section 3.1. We provide it here again for emphasis. In addition to transparency, there are added benefits when this is done well. It strengthens trust in the election process: voters, election officials, and other stakeholders have clear expectations and there is transparent accountability for each step in the process.

It also ensures consistency in how each process is accomplished with a visual reminder; further supporting the goal of improved service with operational improvements

### **7.9 Limit access to the tally room to need only and institute a two-person policy.**

The tally room needs to be the most secure location. The room should be accessed only when necessary and only when two people can be present. Swipe card and paper recording are important. Best practices include regular audits of access logs. It is critical to regularly update who has access. Also, have staff execute an appropriate use and access policy document.

### **7.10 Review chain of custody documentation for delivery and acceptance of all memory cards and voted ballots from Advanced Voting and Election Day.**

*7.10.1 Revisit the written procedures for each election and update the document regularly to ensure compliance.*

*7.10.2 Ensure best practice storage of memory cards and voted ballots.*

### **7.11 Ensure that the COOP plan references in Section 3 includes all scenarios that might affect voting.**

Many COOP plans are developed and managed in silos, often by IT or Emergency Management teams. In elections it is important to not simply check the box that there is a plan but ensure it contains plans for disruption to the voting process. Similar to the prior recommendation, imagine worst-case scenarios and write down your fallback procedures including necessary contracts and decision checkpoints.

**7.12 Define, write, and get specific agreement vendor/partner roles and responsibilities. This should include defined roles for:**

- Secretary of State
- County IT
- County Telecom
- Dominion
- Knowink
- Security
- Sherriff or other law enforcement

Given how much rides on dependencies out of your direct control, it is important that your office lead the process. We suggest regular meetings beginning about 10 weeks out from each election. This is certainly true with respect to your IT and telecom infrastructure partners. Build a list of tasks and their respective owners. This process itself will uncover plenty of hidden landmines and develop needed relationships.

For example, the list for your County Telecom might include things like voice and data for call center and field operations; help lines and hunt groups; call forwarding; Election Day bridge lines; and cell phone monitoring for Election Day.

**7.13 Provide a color coded system for security badges issued to staff, poll workers, poll watchers, and visitors, to make it readily apparent who is authorized to be in each room throughout the election period and on Election Day..**

In operations where many activities are occurring simultaneously, with many permanent staff, temporary staff, and observers all sharing space, providing a visual sense of organization can be reassuring.

For example, on Election Night when materials are returned, some people have security privileges to transport materials like ballot bags from poll workers to storage; others can transport electronic media devices like SD Cards from the poll workers to the results tally “gems” room. Providing a color coded system for security badges provides an additional layer of security and accountability.

In addition to color coded badges, consider color coded vests associated with different ballot processing areas, to provide further visibility.

# Implementation Plan

Long-Term Recommendation		3-5 Month Plan		
Build resiliency into Advanced Voting and Election Day plans		Prioritize short-term implementation of key Election Day issue tracking and security protocols.		
Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
7.1	Buy or build an election ticketing system to alert the VRE team to issues during Advanced Voting and on Election Day.	Short-Term	High	\$\$
7.2	Outfit field teams and technicians with smart devices such as tablets or smartphones so they have a full picture of the problem as soon as they walk into a voting location and can close out issues in the ticketing system on-site.	Short-Term	Medium	\$\$
7.3	Utilize a call center ticketing system for operations prior to Election Day to build internal proficiency.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
7.3.2	Consider building your election hotlines infrastructure in partnership with other county operations.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
7.4	Build a cheat sheet that can be used in the precinct or in the call center based on the most frequently asked questions from prior elections.	Short-Term	High	None
7.5	Have poll workers set up the epollbooks on Monday night and reseal them.	Short-Term	High	\$
7.6	Create a public schedule of events to set expectations for the public and the media.	Short-Term	High	None

# Implementation Plan - cont.

Reference	Detail	Implementation Timeframe	Impact on 2020 Success	Estimated Cost
7.7	Livestream your tally room to give full visibility on the results aggregation process from when poll workers drop off materials to when the data is dropped to the State's election night reporting (ENR) system.	Short-Term	Low	\$
7.8	Build and post a process workflow chart for the tally room similar to the workflows posted for other processes.	Short-Term	Medium	\$
7.9	Limit access to the tally room to need only and institute a two-person policy.	Short-Term	High	None
7.10	Review chain of custody documentation for delivery and acceptance of all memory cards and voted ballots from Advanced Voting and Election Day.	Short-Term	Medium	None
7.11	Ensure that the COOP plan references in Section 3 includes all scenarios that might affect voting.	Long-Term	High	None
7.12	Define, write, and get specific agreement vendor/partner roles and responsibilities. This should include defined roles for parties.	Short-Term	High	None
7.13	Provide security badges to anyone on-premises on Election Day that are coded based on where they may visit.	Short-Term	Medium	\$

# Summary and Next Steps

This report is a comprehensive overview of realistic opportunities to improve the performance of the DeKalb Board of Elections and VRE Department. Our intent was to highlight opportunities for immediate improvement and implementation prior to the 2020 November General Election, future considerations for improvements, as well as areas that will require some time and financial investment.

As you will see, some of the recommendations require a complete redesign of the current process, such as returned mail ballot operations. Improvements to complex election operations and processes require commitment by leadership and staff. And knowledgeable staff play an important role in process improvement. Thus, we have shared guidance and recommendations but the next step is adoption and implementation. Each of the items were addressed generally, as appropriate for given recommendations, and for the level of review we conducted.

Additionally, we acknowledge that we produced this report with little documentation from the VRE including limited observation and access to staff and the operational areas of the office. This impacted our ability to determine feasibility for implementation of our recommendations. We suggest having VRE staff review each of the recommendations presented and provide their perspective as to feasibility.

Further, we felt the issues identified with the My Voter Page were significant. Thus, we sent proposed revisions to the Secretary of States' office for consideration given the statewide impact.

Election operations are complex and DeKalb voters deserve an outstanding voting experience. We are optimistic that the VRE and county leadership are committed to delivering an improved voting experience for all voters. These recommendations provide a roadmap to make this happen.



# Inbound Ballot Processing Guide

This guidance is general in nature and may not apply exactly as written to your local jurisdiction. It is meant to provide a baseline for ramping up your inbound mail processes. It is built from best practices around the country but will need to be adjusted for your own situation.

## Assumptions:

Ballots will NOT need to be sorted into precincts or ballot faces and can be tabulated in any order, either on a high speed central count scanner, or on precinct count scanners.

## General Information

1. Walk through each stage of the process using this guide as a checklist to find steps that are missing, redundant, or areas where you could have a potential bottleneck. Document any missing steps or supplies.
2. Try to conduct time studies once full ballot processing is underway (after June 1). You want to know how long it takes a set of ballots to get through the process. Depending on the size of your county that could be a tray of 100 ballots or 1,000 ballots spread over several trays. The idea is to know how long it takes to move that quantity of ballots through each step of the process so you can better prepare for peak demand.
3. In large counties, cross-train Signature Verifiers, Ballot Scanners, and Duplication/Adjudication teams where possible. Anyone can be given a set of instructions to open ballots but the other functions require some skill and training and should be cross-trained.
4. Establish a formal observation area for poll watchers and assign a supervisor or member of staff to help answer questions. This can be one area for the entire room, or separate areas for each stage/area of the process.
5. When calculating the amount of space you need, the more you can get the better.
  - Having space to physically separate process areas helps you have greater control of and security for the process.
  - It also helps avoid trays of ballots being inadvertently moved to the wrong processing station. Necessary space includes room to store ballots, ballot envelopes, and miscellaneous contents that arrive. **Nothing should be thrown away until after the period to challenge the election has passed.**

## Social Distancing

- Evaluate the steps in each stage of processing for adequate social distancing.
- Creating space between processes and the people performing each process
- Example: Instead of working side-to-side at a table, you may want staff facing each other at opposite ends of a 6-foot table.

## Equipment and Supplies

Each stage of ballot processing should have its own unique equipment and supplies. Even if separate rooms are not available, consider having individual carts or tables setup with supplies for each stage of processing; remember to include a large sign or label indicating which stage the table or cart of materials is for.

Keep ballots and ballot envelopes organized as they are moved through each stage of processing. This can be done by using mail trays with large colored mail tray labels (or purchasing colored mail trays). In addition to **mail trays** you may need:



- Mail tray carts or mail cages on wheels
- Carts that can be locked and sealed (in lieu of secure storage rooms)
- Signs that can be attached to carts showing contents and status
- Folding tables and chairs (can be rented or borrowed)
- Ballot storage containers used post-scanning/pre-audit (plastic tubs would work well here)
- Colored vests or lanyards to designate who is working in what area if multiple processes are happening at the same time.
- Large signs to designate each processing area. (A plus if you can include visual charts displaying the steps in each individual processing stage.)

## Ballot Accounting

A **ballot tracking form** should be completed to account for all absentee ballots. This form should be attached to a batch or batch tray and follow the specific collection of ballots through their entire lifecycle. Minimally it should include a place to verify the total number of envelopes in a batch, those accepted after signature verification, those accepted after ensuring a signature is on the security envelope, the total number of ballot cards removed from security envelopes, and the total number of ballots scanned along with who took custody every time mail trays/batch/bins with ballots move or change hands.

These processes work best when there is a predetermined batch size; somewhere in the range of 25-100 ballots per batch works best. That means after ballots have been received from the postal service or drop boxes, they are immediately batched and each batch is given a batch control log that follows the set of ballots through the counting process. First the batch is sent to the verification process, after signatures have been accepted, the batches are placed in mail trays and stored until the next step. There will always be situations where that number can vary (maybe there is only half of a batch worth of envelopes left after the last postal service delivery) but for the most part, it is the number of ballots each processing station expects to see in a batch and serves as a good measure of control.

## Ballot Envelope Batch Control Sheet

A ballot control sheet should be attached to each batch. The example below follows all accepted ballots through counting, and accounts for those removed from the batch because of problems in signature verification or security envelope signing. Ideally the Batch Name/Number is pre-printed.

Ballot Envelope Batch Control Sheet				
Batch Name:(ex 06/11/20-5)		Batch Creation Date:		
Signature Verification				
Name:				
Name:				
Beginning Count		Rejected		Final Count
	-		=	
Verification count verified?				Initials:
Date:				Time:
Ballot Preparation				
Name:				
Name:				
Verification Count		Envelope Error		Final Count
	-		=	
Opener count verified?				Initials:
Date:				Time:
Ballot Scanning				
Scanner ID:		Batch #:		
Name:				
Preparation Count		Removed for Duplication		Final Count
	-		=	
Scanner count verified?				Initials:
Date:				Time:

## Process 1 - Ballot Receiving

### Room Preparation

- Tables, spaced safely apart, with room to deposit USPS deliveries or open ballot drop boxes and remove contents.
- Labeled mail trays for non-ballot mail and other “stuff” that gets delivered.
- Large sign designating this as the ‘Ballot Receiving Area’.



### Supplies

- Scissors or wire cutters for removing security seals on drop boxes
- Sanitization supplies such as hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, disposable gloves, etc.
- (Optional) Scales; calibrated each day, these can provide a quick, accurate piece count of the number of ballots in a mail tray or ballot box.
- Blank Ballot Batch Control Sheets (example on previous page).
- Gloves are advised for workers handling documents (such as mail, that was previously handled by others) \*Gloves, must be removed before touching one’s face to avoid contamination and transmission)

### Ballot Drop Box Receiving Process

Staff should only open one box at a time.

1. Stage ballot boxes on tables.
2. Compare the numbers on the box security seal to the numbers on the [Security Log or Chain of Custody Log].
3. If the numbers match, remove the seal and place it in a box designated for returned drop box seals.
4. Unlock padlock with supplied key and reattach the locks to the ballot box handles.
5. Transfer contents of the ballot box to mail tray(s).
6. Determine a piece count by hand or by weighing the mail tray.
7. Record the piece count and drop box location on the Drop Box Log.

Drop Box Log			
Receiving Date	Box Location	Print Name/ Signature	Piece Count
06-11-20	Court House	Sally Smith	231
		John Doe	

8. Sort
  - Remove any non-ballot materials and place in the “Miscellaneous materials” tray.
  - Remove non-county ballots and place them in the “Other County Ballots” tray. These ballots must be date and time stamped manually and grouped by jurisdiction. They should be sent via overnight mail to the corresponding jurisdiction.
  - Remove any homemade envelopes and place in the “Wrong Envelope” tray
  - Remove any loose ballots - ballots with no envelope - and place in the “Loose Ballots” tray.
  - Remove any envelopes from previous elections and place in the “Prior Elections” tray.
9. Arrange ballots in mail trays in so they are label side up and facing the same direction.
  - Each tray should have a predetermined quantity of ballots, e.g. 100.
10. Complete the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet** by filling in the batch name/number (if not pre-filled), the date, and the **Beginning Count**.
11. Send trays to Process 2 - Signature Verification.

### USPS Mail Tray Receiving Process

1. Arrange for pickup or delivery with USPS
2. Determine a piece count by hand or by weighing the ballot box.
3. Record the piece count on the [Mail Delivery Log].
4. Sort other mail from trays and place in appropriate bins.
5. Arrange ballots in mail trays so they are label side up and facing the same direction.
6. Batch the ballots in groups
7. Complete the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet** by filling in the batch name/number (if not pre-filled), the date, and the **Beginning Count**.
8. Send trays to Process 2 - Signature Verification.

Ballot Envelope Batch Control Sheet			
Batch Name: 6/11/20-5		Batch Creation Date: 06/12/20	
Signature Verification			
Name:			
Name:			
Beginning Count		Rejected	Final Count
100	-		=
Verification count verified?			Initials:
Date:			Time:

## Process 2 - Voter Credit and Signature Verification

### Room Preparation

- Dedicated workstations, spaced safely apart, with room to operate a hand scanner and process all the ballots in a batch.
- Room to operate by allowing staff to check-out and return batches from a secure storage cart.
- Shelves or carts and small mail trays for ballots that are rejected and moved to the 'cure' process.
- Gloves are advised for workers handling documents.
- Large sign designating this as the 'Signature Verification Area'.



### Supplies

- Hand scanners
- Mail trays
- Blank Rejected Ballot / Cure Tray Control Logs

### Signature Verification Process

1. Check out batches of returned ballot envelopes to be verified (use Checkout Control Log).
2. The barcode on the ballot return envelope is scanned or voter ID entered into VRS.
3. Verify voter and compare the signature on the envelope with the signature on file (according to state process).
4. Accepted return ballots are marked accordingly in VRS and remain physically in the batch.
5. Rejected return ballots are marked accordingly in VRS and on the envelope.
  - Use a red pen to write the rejection reason on the lower right corner of the front of the ballot envelope (missing signature, signature mismatch, etc.)
  - Move rejected envelopes to the 'rejected/cure' tray.
  - Complete the 'Rejected Ballot / Cure Tray Control Log'
6. At the end of the day, perform a piece count to ensure the total number of 'accepted' and 'rejected' return envelopes match what is showing in the voter registration system (VRS).
7. Check in the 'accepted' ballot envelopes batches (use Checkout Control Log).
8. Complete the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
9. Slice/cut/mill open envelopes for batches that have been accepted.
10. Send trays to Process 3 - Ballot Preparation along with the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.

Ballot Envelope Batch Control Sheet			
Batch Name: 6/11/20-5		Batch Creation Date: 06/12/20	
Signature Verification			
Name: <i>Captain America</i>			
Name: <i>Iron Man</i>			
Beginning Count		Rejected	Final Count
<i>100</i>	-	<i>4</i>	= <i>96</i>
Verification count verified?			Initials: <i>JM</i>
Date:	<i>06/12/20</i>	Time: <i>11:45</i>	

Rejected Ballot / Cure Tray Control Log				
Date	Number of New Ballots Envelopes Added to Tray	Print Name/ Signature (Signature Verification Operator)	Batch Number	Total Batch Rejected Tray Count
06/12/20	4	Captain America	06/11/20-5	
		Iron Man		

Ballot Envelope Batch Check in and Check out Control Log				
Date	Batch Name and Number	Print Name/ Signature	Name of Process	Control Sheet Piece Count
06/12/20	06/11/20-5	Captain America	Verification	100
		Iron Man		

## Process 3 - Ballot Preparation

### Room Preparation

- Tables arranged so that teams can sit at opposite ends from each other.
- Each table should have a 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' tray.
- Staging area for envelopes coming from Signature Verification ready for ballots to be extracted.
- Staging area for empty envelopes, return envelopes, and empty security envelopes.
- Staging area for ballot batches ready to move to scanning
- Batch envelopes/folders
- Batch folder labels
- Large sign designating this as the 'Ballot Preparation Area'.



### Supplies

- Rubber fingers to help with hand counting for piece count.
- Rubber bands
- Hand letter openers for opening security envelopes.
- Blank 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' log"
- Gloves are advised for workers handling documents (such as mail, that was previously handled by others) \*Gloves, must be removed before touching one's face to avoid contamination and transmission)

### Ballot Preparation Process

1. Retrieve a batch of ballot envelopes.
2. Record names and 'Signature Verification Count' on the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**
3. Remove the security envelope from the return envelope
  - Verify a signature is present on the security envelope.
  - If there is no signature, replace the security envelope back in the return envelope.
  - Place the return envelope in the 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' tray.
4. If there are 2 security envelopes in the return envelope, both envelopes are rejected.
  - Place the 2 security envelopes back in the return envelope.
  - Place the return envelope in the 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' tray.
5. After verification of a signature on the flap of the security envelope, detach signature flap, use letter openers to cut open the security envelope.
  - It's best to tap the envelope on the table to push the envelope to the bottom of the envelope before using a letter opener to open the security envelope.
6. Remove the ballot from the security envelope.
7. Remove any stray stubs left on the ballot (if applicable).

8. Prepare the ballot for scanning by flattening/backbending the folds so the ballot lays flat.
9. Count the number of envelopes in the Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error tray and enter in the Ballot Preparation section of the Ballot Batch Control Sheet (Envelope Error).
10. Hand count the extracted ballots.
11. Ensure the hand count matches the total ballots from the Verification Count minus the Envelope Errors and enter on the Ballot Preparation section of the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
12. Place the flattened ballots in a mail tray or tub and band with the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
13. Run a zip tie through the return envelopes (if you have a pre-drilled hole) to ensure they are empty and place them in the storage area along with security envelopes, stubs, etc.
14. Attach a label with the batch name to the empty return ballot envelopes.
15. Return the tray containing envelopes from 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' tray to a Lead or Supervisor and exchange for an empty tray.
16. Place ballots ready to be scanned in the batch folder/envelope.
17. Place a label on the folder similar to the example on page 11.
18. Send trays to Process 4 - Ballot Scanning along with the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.

Ballot Preparation			
Name: <i>Black Widow</i>			
Name: <i>Mr. Hulk</i>			
Verification Count		Envelope Error	Final Count
<i>96</i>	-	<i>1</i>	= <i>95</i>
Opener count verified?			Initials: <i>NP</i>
Date:	<i>06/12/20</i>	Time: <i>1:13</i>	

### Lead/Supervisor Accounting Process for ballots sent to Missing Signature/Error Tray

A Ballot Preparation Lead or Supervisor would complete the following steps when a Ballot Preparation team brings them the disqualified return envelopes.

1. Verify the security envelopes in the 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' tray are unsigned, unsealed, or the return envelope has more than one security envelope by visually inspecting and then writing the reason on the front of each return envelope.
2. Rubber band the return envelopes together by rejection reason.
3. Enter the time and date, rejection reason, envelope quantity, and initials in the 'Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error' log.
4. Place banded envelopes together in a tray or ballot storage container.

Security Envelope Missing Signature/Error Tray Control Log					
Date	Time	Batch Number	Rejection Reason	Total Envelope Count	Lead Initials/Signature
<i>6/12/20</i>	<i>1:20</i>	<i>156985</i>	<i>Missing signature</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>RC</i>

## Process 4 - Ballot Scanning

### Room Preparation

- Scanners spaced safely apart with room on the table to accommodate the tray of batches / ballots coming in to be scanned and the storage container for scanned batches.
- Carts to move sealed ballot storage containers to a staging area.
- Dedicated space for ballot duplication (ballots that are damaged/torn/or need augmentation or remake/duplication due to voter intent issues).
- Dedicated space for ballot remake / adjudication.
- Large sign designating this as the 'Ballot Scanning Area'.

### Supplies

- Ballot storage containers for scanned/counted ballots
- Ballot storage container labels
- Blank ballots or BOD for duplication (and adjudication if not doing electronically)
- Duplication log and labels/stamp
- Voter intent guidelines (or whatever each county is using)

### Ballot Scanning Process

1. Complete the 'Batch Control' portion of the ballot envelope label (page 11) using the 'Preparation Count' from the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
2. Scan ballots.
3. Count the number of ballots out-stacked or removed for human review/duplication.
4. Enter quantity in the 'Removed for Duplication' box on the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
5. Complete the **Ballot Batch Control Sheet**.
6. Verify that the total number of ballot cards scanned (as indicated by the scanner) equals the number of ballot cards in the batch (as indicated by the 'Final Count').
7. Complete the 'Scanning Room' portion of the batch folder label.
8. Place the ballots inside the folder.
9. Enter information from the batch folder label onto the appropriate line of the ballot storage container label and place the folder inside the storage container.
10. When the container reaches its maximum capacity, apply the storage container label, security seals, and transfer to the staging/storage area.
11. Transfer ballots needing adjudication/duplication.

Ballot Scanning			
Scanner ID: <b>1</b>		Batch #:	
Name: <b>Pat Johnson</b>			
Preparation Count	Removed for Duplication	=	Final Count
<b>95</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>90</b>
Scanner count verified?			Initials: <b>JM</b>
Date: <b>06/12/20</b>			Time: <b>4:30</b>

Example: Batch Folder Label

<b>BATCH CONTROL</b>	Batch Name	<i>6/11/20-5</i>
	Preparation Count:	<i>95</i>
	Staff Initials:	<i>TP</i>
<b>SCANNING ROOM</b>	Final Count:	<i>90</i>
	Scanner ID:	<i>01</i>
	Staff Initials:	<i>JM</i>
<b>NOTES</b>	<i>5 ballots removed for duplication</i>	

Example: Ballot Container Label

<b>CONTAINER NAME: FY-5</b>		
<b>Scanner Name</b>	<b>Batch #</b>	<b>Total Ballots</b>
<i>1</i>	<i>6/11/20-5</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>6/11/20-6</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>6/11/20-7</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>6/11/20-8</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>6/11/20-9</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>TOTAL BALLOTS:</b>		<i>460</i>
<b>Seal #</b> <i>A95162</i>		
<b>Staff Initials:</b> <i>TP/JM</i>		

## Ballot Adjudication Process

- An increased quantity of hand-marked paper ballots will generate a need for ballot adjudication teams to make decisions about voter intent/marginal marks.
- If your current voting system supports electronic adjudication, then all you need is an area set up for the workstations.
- If you use a manual adjudication process, the ballot duplication considerations listed below are vital to think about.
- Statewide voter intent guidelines are an important element in the adjudication process, whether it is manual or electronic.
- Post a large chart with examples of a “valid vote” near the adjudication stations to increase transparency and reinforce what was covered in training.

## Ballot Duplication Process

Ballot Duplication/Resolution Team(s) are responsible for duplicating/replicating ballots that are damaged due to tears, folds, undervoted, overvoted, or stray marks on the ballot face that prevent the ballot from being read by the scanners. If the intent of the voter is not clear, see Resolution Board duties.

1. Ballots will be delivered to Duplication/Resolution Board by the Scanner Operator
  2. Fill out the duplication log:
    - Date
    - Ballot style
    - Control number (original/duplicate ballot)
    - Duplication team initials
  3. Duplicate/resolve ballots using the following procedures:
    - Retrieve a blank ballot, checking to ensure the correct ballot style.
    - One member of the team read the voters selections from the original ballot.
    - Another team member marks the same selections on the duplicate ballot.
    - After marking all ballots, switch stacks and the person with the duplicate ballot reads back the selections to the person with the original ballot.
    - Place a label or stamp on the original ballot and duplicate ballot with a place to indicate the control number and initials of each member of the duplication team.
    - Place the damaged ballots in a container to be sealed with the duplication log at the conclusion of the election.
- Purchase the necessary ballot stock and toner is using a ballot on demand (BOD) system to create the duplicate ballot style.
    - If using a BOD, are you planning for the necessary ballot stock and toner?
  - Create duplication logs and ballot labels (for original ballot) with pre-filled control numbers.