

VOTE HOME

DeKalb County Post-Election Update:

Scheduling, Planning, & Space

Changes in voter patterns has required a change in department operations, namely around absentee ballot processing. Given that this operation requires additional time and resources, we would suggest putting extra emphasis on establishing well-defined schedules and staffing plans to ensure effective collaboration with other county departments and that appropriate numbers of staff are available at any given time.

In addition, the department has gradually obtained extra space as has been possible. While extra space is always appreciated, the “piecemeal” process has created a maze of an office, limiting the ability to operate in a linear fashion. When given the time, we’d recommend reimagining the space to ensure it makes the most seamless and transparent process possible.

Recommendations:

- Review and reimagine current space to create more linear and transparent process
- Utilize and regularly update forecasts of voter turnout and calculated throughput times to inform processing decisions
- Define and provide planned working days and hours to all staff to ensure processing capacity meets department needs, with the understanding that unforeseen circumstances may require changes “on the fly”
- Create project plans with deadlines, responsible parties, etc. to ensure effective collaboration with other county departments when requiring their assistance
- Create a five-year plan for the office with goals for improvements in space, staffing, space, equipment, etc.

Personnel, Staffing & Internal Communication

DeKalb VRE has some amazing people as part of the organization. They are dedicated to their job, to the election process generally, and to each other. These staff play a critical role in the success of the department, but often seem unable to perform to their highest potential.

In addition, we see a significant gap in middle management personnel. The full-time team has too much on their plate to be involved in the minute details of each task. For example, there should be a dedicated lead or supervisor for each step of the absentee process because an absentee coordinator cannot physically be in so many places at one time. We’d recommend

utilizing and growing some of your loyal temporary or part-time employees to fill that role during election season since the roles are only required during that time.

The current department special projects manager is tasked with many different things such as absentee application processing, board communications, etc. We would recommend that it is important for the office to also have a PMP[®] Certified project manager, who is able to help with throughput, process improvements, or projects such as audits, recounts, or department moves that are outside the organization's normal operations.

Finally, we noticed that some challenges facing the department could likely be solved with clear and regular internal communication procedures. We would recommend establishing weekly team meetings and/or daily 15-minute "stand-ups" to ensure that all full-time staff and supervisors are aware of important issues, changes, schedules, etc. A communication plan should also be established for keeping part-time and temporary staff aware of relevant information, such as schedule changes, how to handle questions from monitors, etc.

Recommendations:

- Establish official supervisory roles for process steps; promote and pay loyal temporary staff accordingly
- Continue to train and grow dedicated and talented staff - both full-time and part-time/temporary - such that they can take on additional responsibilities and create a "talent pipeline" for the office
- Conduct staff reviews after each election season to determine areas of success and growth
- Define tiers of decision making such that all staff are clear on what decisions they can and should make, or when it should be brought to a higher authority
- Hire a PMP[®] Certified project manager
- Host daily 15-minute "stand-up" meetings with all full-time staff and supervisors
- Establish communication plan to share relevant information with part-time and temporary staff

Processes, Documentation, & Tracking

In the current political environment with increased attention to election processes, standard operating procedures, documentation, and reconciliation are more important than ever. We would recommend taking the time to review, document, and (if required) appropriately revise all absentee ballot processes.

We also would recommend special attention to what we call "process flow" - the ability to keep ballots moving smoothly through the process without significant delay. A PMP certified project manager would likely be helpful in review and refinement of this part of the process.

Recommendations:

- Conduct thorough review of absentee ballot processing steps (including UOCAVA and provisionals), including comparison to statute, measurement of throughput times, review of transfer procedures, etc.
- Focus on how to create smooth process flow to keep ballots moving consistently and avoid significant down-time
- Establish written SOPs, instructions, and/or training videos for each step of the process, to be provided to staff as well as to monitors or public observers
- Host mandatory training review for all staff each election cycle to ensure compliance and consistency
- Create tracking mechanism to understand where ballots are throughout processing; reconcile ballots received and scanned with each step of the process to ensure no ballots left behind (also helps identify process bottlenecks)

Chain of Custody & Security Protocols

In our experience, one of the areas with the highest probability for litigation in any jurisdiction is chain of custody. This is particularly important with the physical space limitations that DeKalb faces. We'd encourage the department to spend extra time in their process review considering ways to enhance their current procedures, including requiring more documentation.

Recommendations:

- Thoroughly review current procedures at each transfer point for both absentee and in-person ballots
- Establish and distribute written SOPs
- Require documentation and maintenance of records showing transfers of ballots, particularly when they move from one room to another

Transparency & Public Presence

The American public and media have paid much more attention to elections offices and processes, which creates both increased responsibility and opportunity for the department to control the narrative. The Profile PR team did a superb job starting the process of developing the department's public image, managing media inquiries, and increasing transparency. We'd highly encourage the department to continue engaging with professionals like that team, but to also consider hiring a full-time PR person to support the agency's efforts.

Recommendations:

- Hire full-time PR person to support and engage with hired agency
- Continue with excellent media engagement arranged and supported by Profile PR team
- Continue with improvements on website that have already created a much more user-friendly experience
 - Take time to refine pages to reduce redundancy
 - Check and update all links

- Keep notices, agendas, and minutes updated
- Continue with live streaming operations
- Host a live streamed tour of absentee ballot processing (via Facebook or Twitter Live for example)
- Host media tours of facilities
- Publish detailed guides for poll watchers, monitors, and public observers
- Add charts of absentee returns, early voting turnout, and comparisons to past elections to the website

In addition to these recommendations, the following items from the evaluation that the BOE commissioned in Feb 2020 are still recommended: