

Election Administration Grant Request

Background

The City of Milwaukee Election Commission's mission is to ensure that elections are administered in a fair, transparent, equitable and accessible manner in order to instill voter confidence in the democratic process. The Commission envisions a future where every eligible voter in the City of Milwaukee is able to exercise their right to vote. Since 2020, the election administration landscape has changed drastically as a result of the COVID19 pandemic and increased political attention on the administration of elections. Post-2020, the City has continued to see over a 400% increase in by-mail voting, the continued increase of voters choosing the convenience of voting early in-person, as well as increased security concerns from our personnel for both their own personal safety and the safety of our election infrastructure. In 2023, the City of Milwaukee also faced an uncertain fiscal future due to increased pension costs and the inability to increase local revenue without the approval of the state legislature. The legislature increased the amount of shared revenue for municipalities and enabled the City of Milwaukee to pass a local sales tax in mid-July of 2023, well after departments were asked to submit their requested budgets. Even after the legislative change, City departments exercised restraint when increasing their departmental requests out of an abundance of caution since the overall fiscal outlook is uncertain and sales tax revenue was specifically appropriated to other initiatives. The following proposal encompasses remaining election administration needs that would improve election security, efficiency, and accessibility in the 2024 election cycle for all City of Milwaukee voters and election workers.

Request

	Cost per Unit	Quantity	Total Cost
DS-950	\$ 146,375.00	2.00	\$ 292,750.00
ExpressVotes	\$ 4,225.00	50.00	\$ 211,250.00
Android Smartphone	\$ 700.00	210.00	\$ 147,000.00
TextMyGov Set-Up & First Year	\$ 37,500.00	1.00	\$ 37,500.00
A-Frames	\$ 130.00	100.00	\$ 13,000.00
A-Frame Signage	\$ 37.00	300.00	\$ 11,100.00
Table Trolley	\$ 425.00	10.00	\$ 4,250.00
Electric Pallet Jack	\$ 5,000.00	2.00	\$ 10,000.00
Additional Security Cameras	\$ 2,500.00	20.00	\$ 50,000.00
Additional Lighting on Front Exterior of Ops Center	\$ 10,000.00	1.00	\$ 10,000.00
			\$ 786,850.00

Description of Requested Line Items

DS-950 High-Speed Tabulator

Despite the bi-partisan passage of an assembly bill in the Wisconsin legislature that would allow the processing of absentee ballots to begin Monday, the Senate has indicated that it will not move the bill forward in the remaining 2024 session. As a result, the City of Milwaukee continues to face the challenge of processing an estimated 100,000 absentee ballots in one single day. The City has already leased a convention space and plans to have at least 300 election workers in place to process absentee ballots. However, the delay of absentee results late into the evening remains a problem of

volume, equipment imperfections, and timing, not one of personnel or space. The sooner we are able to complete tabulation on Election night, the faster we will be able to transmit results to the County and reducing the accusations of “ballot dumps” late in the night. As a result, the City is requesting to purchase two additional DS-950 highspeed tabulators.

The City of Milwaukee’s uses high-speed tabulators to process ballots by ward. Two of the City’s tabulators are over 9 years old and have begun experiencing increased mechanical issues. In the most recent election, the mechanical issue of one machine was not able to be repair by election staff and was out of commission for the remainder of the day. As a result, the City is requesting to purchase two DS-950s, the more modern equivalent of the existing tabulators. This will ensure that we have an adequate number of tabulators, even if one is out of commission, in order to process such a large volume of ballots and deliver absentee results as soon as possible on Election Day.

ExpressVotes

The paper-based ExpressVote machine combines touchscreen ballot marking technology with an integrated thermal printer to produce a paper record for tabulation. The ExpressVote saves time, reduces marking errors, and lowers costs. Additionally, it is an ADA compliant machine that allows voters with vision or hearing impairments to cast a ballot independently. The City of Milwaukee uses ExpressVotes at all early voting sites in order to eliminate the need to maintain a paper ballot inventory for 354 wards. Operationally, this saves time and money and also allows City of Milwaukee voters to cast a ballot at any early voting location across the City.

In 2022, the City retired the outdated ADA-accessible AutoMark ballot marking devices at polling places and implemented the usage of the ExpressVotes. The City is committed that all voters have the ability to cast ballots independently and privately on reliable, modern equipment. However, this transition has depleted the supply of ExpressVotes for use at early voting, as they have to be moved to the polling places when early voting is still taking place. As a result, in order to minimize wait times and ensure ADA accessibility at all voting sites during early voting and on Election Day, the City is requesting to purchase 50 additional ExpressVotes for usage at early voting. These machines will be deployed to our busiest early voting sites (Capitol Drive Voting Center, Serb Hall, and Zeidler Municipal Building) and ensure that no matter where you vote in the City of Milwaukee, you are not waiting in long lines due to a lack of equipment.

Android Smartphones

Currently, each polling place is sent a flip phone that is used as the primary means of contact between Election Commission staff and polling place staff on Election Day. The City would like to replace these flip phones with the Galaxy Xcover6 Pro, a military-spec strength smartphone that is durable, has excellent battery life, and will be able to serve multiple functions on Election Day. By purchasing these devices for the retail price, the Election Commission is not required to have an ongoing data and cellular plan. Instead, we are able to activate the phones only during the months of an election. Having a smartphone will enable the Commission to enhance voter resources at the polls. Staff will be trained in the usage of the the MyVote website to troubleshoot voter issues and redirect voters to the correct polling place. Additionally, it will enable chief inspectors to have additional tools such as a camera to document any concerns or questions.

Text My Gov Set-Up and First Year Cost

The Election Commission is seeking to utilize Text My Gov as a non-partisan communication tool for voters and election staff. Text My Gov has been providing citizen engagement and text-based

communication to cities and counties in the United States and Canada since 2019 and serves more than 700 agencies throughout the United States including many throughout Wisconsin. Text My Gov System was the first in this market to provide a Smart Texting Solution, with customizable responses, smart responses, website integration, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reporting, and citizen requests with custom questions. In addition, Text My Gov has built-in Artificial Intelligence to track recommended changes and can automatically search the Agencies' website.

The Election Commission would like to use Text My Gov in order to provide non-partisan voting information to City of Milwaukee voters. As mis-, dis-, and mal-information continues to be rampant in the election sphere, the Commission feels it is extremely important to have a direct means to communicate with all voters and provide election information directly from a trusted source. Additionally, Text My Gov will allow voters to text in questions and use Artificial Intelligence to locate basic questions that are often found on our website. Finally, it will also provide a more efficient way for curbside voters to notify election inspectors that they are outside of a polling place and in need of assistance. The program does not require any account set-up or application download for the public as it is entirely texting based.

Additionally, Text My Gov would allow the Commission to create contact groups specific to election workers, technicians and troubleshooters. This will enable the Commission staff to provide communication, including election announcements, reminders, and potentially emergency communications, to staff in an efficient manner on Election Day.

Election Operations Center Equipment

The Commission continues to receive feedback that voters at early voting locations and polling places want additional signage. Over half of the City's polling places are located within schools which often have several entrances and span the space of an entire city block. As a result, the Commission is requesting to purchase an additional 100 a-frames that will accommodate 300 interchangeable signs 2-foot by 3-foot signs. These will be deployed to provide specific entrance information at polling places across the City and ensure that no one is leaving a polling place out of frustration that they cannot find the entrance.

The Election Commission is requesting the purchase of two electric pallet jacks and 10 table trolleys that each hold 20 tables in order to improve basic worker safety at our Operations Center. Currently, the staff at the Operations Center only have manual pallet jacks that create safety hazards when moving large loads from the loading dock at an incline. The reality of elections' seasonal nature is that much of our temporary workforce is older and often seek out our part-time opportunities after retirement. The addition of two electric pallet jacks would create a much safer work environment and more efficient operations. Additionally, the Election Commission stacks tables on dollies that are not meant for tables and are not stabilized. The requested portable table trollies will allow staff to safely and efficiently transport tables needed for polling places, trainings, and early voting sites.

Election Operations Center Security Enhancements

The Election Commission's Operations Center is the hub of election activity during each election cycle. At our center, we store and maintain all voting equipment and polling place supplies. Additionally, all blank ballots are stored at the center and all incoming voted absentee ballots are processed and stored until Election Day at the center. During non-General elections, Central Count processing also takes place at the Operations Center.

Due to it being the centralized hub of most election administration activity, the Commission would like to add 20 additional security cameras to the inside of the building. This will enhance existing cameras, provide additional angles, and ensure the safety of election workers and election materials at all times.

The majority of the building has exterior lighting. However, the front of the building lacks illumination. The Commission is requesting funding to add additional lighting to the front of the building after having several different government agencies, including CISA, provide safety and security assessments. Enhancing the lighting will prevent undetected entry into the building, as well as increase visibility for workers and voters entering and leaving the building after dark.