

City of Milwaukee Election Commission 2007 2008 Strategic / Operational Plan

Since the release of the 2005 City of Milwaukee Election Task Force report, the Election Commission has administered the production of five elections, including the Gubernatorial Primary and General elections. Significant system improvements have occurred within the Election Commission during this period of time.

In 2008, the four elections scheduled include the Presidential Preference and General, Mayoral and Aldermanic races and County Supervisors, as well as other state and federal contests. Challenges to the department will be comparable to the 2004 Presidential election, with voter turnout for these elections projected as follows:

FEB 2008 Pres Pref/ Spring Primary	APR 2008 Spring Gen: Mayor/Ald	SEPT 2008 Fall Primary	NOV 2008 Presidential
137,362	163,026	94,643	277,535

During April 2007, the staff of the Election Commission met to evaluate the department's performance during the 2006/2007 elections and determine long-range strategic goals in order to prepare for 2008. Additionally, information provided by election workers, as well as the "2006 Election Review" written by Milwaukee Election Protection, were reviewed and integrated into this strategic plan.

There is widespread consensus that the Election Commission has experienced significant success in a number of areas during recent elections. **Accomplishments** included:

- Most of the goals and objectives identified in the June 2005 Election Task Force report have been completed.
- The passage of AB451, which included key legislative changes to election laws.
- The purge of over 105,000 inactive voter records from the voter registration database.
- Transitioning to the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS).
- The entry of all voter registration applications prior to elections.
- HAVA mandated deadlines met, including accessibility at all polling sites.
- The implementation of the AutoMark (ballot marker for people with disabilities).
- Development of a 2-hour election worker training program, including a training manual and reduced class sizes.
- Increased staffing at polling sites.
- Decreased poll worker no-show rates on Election Day.
- Increased participation of city managers / employees.
- Significant improvement in the quality of polling place election documents and a subsequent decrease in the amount of time required to reconcile after an election.
- A more competent staff of Chief Inspectors.
- A more streamlined / efficient process for in-person absentee ballot voting.
- Consistent reviews of campaign finance reports.
- Regularly scheduled training for Special Registration Deputies.

- Upgraded the department's election programming and results management software.
- Increased communication with the Milwaukee County Election Commission and the State Elections Board.
- Improved media relations.

It was also identified that the Election Commission is experiencing several new election **trends** that have impacted the capacity and workload of the department:

- A steady increase in absentee ballot applications (often due to absentee ballot registration drives organized by the primary political parties).
- A significant increase in the amount of staff time (approximately three times (3x) longer per record) necessary to enter both voter registrations and absentee ballot applications into the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS). In addition to the necessity to locate and hire a larger data entry staff, the slowness and complexity of the system has a substantial fiscal impact to the Election Commission's budget.
- As with national trends, there is a dwindling public interest in committing a full day of time to working an election. While success has been found in increasing the number of election workers, the skill set remains below what is necessary to effectively operate all sites. This is particularly problematic with Chief Inspectors.
- On-going shifts and changes to election law and State Elections Board rules, particularly in the area of voter registration, is confusing and occasionally immobilizing to election workers. The knowledge-level required is significant and exceeds the ability of most election workers that perform these types of duties only 2-3 times per year.
- A high volume of Election Day registrations that exceeded the capacity of election workers and several polling sites.
- Increased public awareness, scrutinizing and conflict at polling places on Election Day.
- Increased public and media scrutinizing of campaign finance reports.
- Changes in voting machine technology are making the City's Optech Eagle IIP machines increasingly non-compatible and obsolete.
- There is an increased Hmong and Hispanic voter participation.

Given these trends, it is essential for the department to implement **key program initiatives** prior to the 2008 elections in order to avoid a repeat of problems experienced in 2004 and to achieve nationally notable success. These initiatives include:

POLL WORKER

- Develop and launch a comprehensive poll worker recruitment campaign that pursues multiple strategies for recruiting qualified poll workers.
- Revise the current training curriculum and coordinate a mandatory 2-hour poll worker training prior to the 2008 elections. Class sizes not to exceed 100.
- Revise the curriculum and coordinate a 6-hour chief inspector training and pre- and post-training testing process. Class sizes not to exceed 30.
- Facilitate necessary modifications to the poll worker database, either by converting the database to an alternative software or upgrading the current version

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

- Develop and implement procedures for the centralized processing of absentee ballots on Election Day.
- Work with the State Elections Board to resolve on-going problems with the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS), particularly in the area of absentee ballot record management and generating essential voter reports.
- Review and redesign all absentee ballot processing systems.

REGISTRATION

- Develop and maintain quality assurance systems for tracking voter registration and absentee ballot data entered into SVRS.
- Increase the department's involvement in voter registration initiatives, including operating voter registration centers prior to large turn-out elections.
- Develop a formalized system for reviewing registration applications completed by Special Registration Deputies.

POLLING PLACES

- In order to avoid Election Day overcrowding, review all polling sites to assess voting room size and other considerations.
- Develop a written accessibility plan for each polling site, including signage needs, parking, pathways, entrance, equipment needs, etc.

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

- Explore additional staff positions: for example, the responsibility of coordinating the polling place assignment AND training of poll workers exceeds the capacity of one staff position. A thorough review of campaign finance reports and candidate filing records exceeds the capacity of current staff.
- Expand and increase the efficiency of the department's temporary work force, including exploring outsourcing opportunities.
- Develop a more effective structure for supervising and coordinating the department's temporary workforce during high-volume periods.
- Review and modify all systems relating to the candidate filing process and campaign finance reporting.
- Review and update inaccurate information on the department's web site.

In addition to establishing broader goals and objectives, the staff strategic planning process identified specific plausible solutions to challenges encountered during previous elections:

VOTER REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

- **Voter registration application is too small**
 1. Redesign and enlarge voter registration application to include a more readable and larger font size
 2. Ensure the availability of this form in Hmong and Spanish

- **Too many errors in data entry / data entry temps distracted by telephones**
 1. Explore outsourcing data entry
 2. Assign separate temps to telephone coverage responsibility
 3. Increase training – typing proficiency requirement - testing
 4. Each program coordinator to develop and maintain a quality assurance plan for reviewing data, and initiate a system for providing feedback when errors occur.

- **No consistent plan for quality assurance of data**
 1. Develop a plan that allows for the consistent review of registration data being entered into SVRS

- **Insufficient temporary worker staffing for large elections**
 1. Consider outsourcing data entry

- **Special Registration Deputies (SRD) submitting incomplete registration cards (and not returning with completed cards) -> electors believe that they are registered**
 1. Assign a staff person (temp) to review registration cards before they are accepted.
 2. Return incomplete registration cards to the SRD.
 3. Count and record the number of cards returned... have the SRD sign a receipt.

- **Time commitment for training Special Registration Deputies challenging for one person.**
 1. Cross train staff and develop a staff coverage training schedule.

- **Office space / # computers is too small / inadequate for a large number of data entry workers**
 1. Reconfigure data entry space... either in or out of office. Additional computers required.

- **Election Commission not actively engaged in voter registration**
 1. Develop a plan to promote voter registration
 2. Explore pre-election voter registration centers and collaborations with voter rights groups

- **SVRS: slow, several opportunities for data error (e.g. selection of address range)**
 1. Present problems to the State Elections Board (SEB) – advocate for system changes

- **Poll worker interest section from voter registration application is not recorded – information is lost and forwarded to PW Coordinator**
 1. Work with SEB staff to establish a SVRS/database field and use SVRS to track information for PW Coordinator.
- **SVRS: Unable to generate frequent voter or other reports**
 1. Present problems to SEB – advocate for system changes
- **Difficult to single-handedly supervise all aspects of program during busy elections**
 1. Assign lead temporary staff to each program area.
 2. To increase knowledge and information sharing, include lead temp staff in staff meetings

ABSENTEE BALLOT SYTEMS

- **SVRS slow, duplicate ballots, address changes missed, converted mailing addresses incorrect**
 1. Present problems to SEB – advocate for system changes
- **Regular absentee voters receiving ballots indefinitely**
 1. Work with SEB staff to produce mailing labels, information letters to be sent to regular absentee voters.
- **More temps: better supervision and better understanding of tasks**
 1. Increase information-sharing with regular staff meetings
 2. Clarify role of supervisor
 3. Problem solve with temporary workers
- **Too many errors in data entry / No plan for quality assurance**
 1. Coordinator to develop and maintain data quality assurance plan.
- **Assess systems / location for on-site early absentee voting**
 1. Review site and staffing requirements used for on-site early absentee voting.
 2. Develop written procedures
- **Concern with Nursing Home Special Registration Deputies following protocol / unsupervised / missing drop-off deadlines**
 1. Review entire nursing home voting process – revise written procedures.
 2. Assign staff to shadow Special Registration Deputies during voting periods
 3. Pursue clarity with the State Elections Board regarding consistently unvoted ballots.
- **Move of absentee ballot mailing requires installation of additional computer at warehouse**
 1. Secure an additional computer or lap top for use in the warehouse space.

- **Calls with absentee ballot questions not always answered correction – information not always shared among staff**
 1. Develop a fact sheet of frequently asked questions and answers.
 2. Identify appropriate staff for taking more complex questions.
- **Ballots arrive late on Election Day in the mail – difficult to scan, sort and run to polling sites by 8:00 p.m. deadline**
 1. Explore centralized processing of absentee ballots
 2. Pick up Election Day ballots directly from the post office
- **Processing of running absentee ballots and processing at polling sites is problematic – not always handled correctly**
 1. Implement centralized processing of absentee ballots
- **Correspondence/instructions to voters regarding absentee ballot voting are poorly written and not always accurate**
 1. All correspondence to be reviewed by the Coordinator and Assistant Director.
- **Poor communication between Coakley – Warehouse – Absentee Ballots regarding deadlines for packing ballots in machines**
 1. Election Services Coordinator to secure schedule of district pick-ups 10 days prior to an election. Coakley required to follow schedule.
- **Loose system for tracking absentee ballot applications**
 1. Utilize the system piloted for the November 2006 election for every election
- **Increased structure / timeline for processes**
 1. Review and revise written procedures for absentee ballot processes.

POLLING PLACES

- **Polling sites that are too small.**
 1. Review all polling sites, district by district, and pursue alternative sites where necessary.
- **Polling sites that assign rooms that are too small for large turn-out elections**
 1. Increase communication with polling site contacts, particularly schools, prior to elections.
 2. Request a confirmation on the room that is going to be assigned for use.
- **Missing or inconsistent signage: “Where do I Vote?” “Accessible Entrance”**
 1. Develop a plan and strategy for ensuring signs are posted on Election Day. Involve building custodians and election workers.
- **Sites short on supplies / forms**
 1. Develop a “check off” sheet to be signed as verification that each machine has been properly packed with supplies.

- **Voting machine jams**
 1. Discuss the scoring / folding of absentee ballots with the County Election Commission / Printer.
 2. Remind Chief Inspectors not to process absentee ballots before 9:00 a.m.
 3. Centrally process absentee ballots.

- **System for sites requiring street parking and accessible parking is not updated / working.**
 1. Determine which staff person is responsible for this assignment.
 2. Update the list.
 3. Develop a system for completing regular updates.

- **Accessibility... entrances locked at polling places, entrances not visible, pathways not clearly marked.**
 1. Review accessibility signage needs.
 2. Communicate the importance of checking signage and pathway directionals to building custodians and election workers.
 3. Develop a written accessibility plan / fact sheet for each polling site.
 4. Continue collaborations with disability rights groups.

- **Numerous problems with AutoMark**
 1. Explore reconditioning of ink cartridges.
 2. Have machines serviced as part of annual maintenance contract.
 3. Assume role of programming flash cards.
 4. Test all machines prior to each election.
 5. Develop system for documenting problems -> communicate to ES&S.

POLL WORKER

- **Marginal success with poll worker recruitment – broad recruitment net not bringing in a sufficient number or poll workers or the necessary skill set.**
 1. Develop a comprehensive recruitment plan that includes targeted recruitment strategies of election workers, particularly registrars.
 2. Recruit a sufficient number far enough in advance to avoid last-minute hiring.

- **Insufficient staffing at sites (because of no shows) on Election Day**
 1. Recruit and train a surplus of poll workers and maintain a reserve list for Election Day no shows.

- **Significant investment of time / resources in completing election worker payroll**
 1. Review the current steps for completing payroll
 2. Work with the Comptrollers Office to streamline the payroll system.

- **Training curriculum needs to be reviewed, updated and better organized.**
 1. Revise the content of the current manual.

2. Explore outsourcing development of the manual to a professional curriculum developer.
- **Chief inspectors not qualified or able**
 1. Develop a targeted recruitment strategy for qualified Chief Inspectors.
 2. Develop training and testing process for Chief Inspectors.
 - **Poll worker database (Voter) requires revamping or conversion to SVRS or Access database**
 1. Explore the most appropriate system. Options include:
 - A. Upgrading Voter
 - B. Converting to a Microsoft Access database.
 - C. Converting to SVRS
 - **Need more community sponsored sites**
 1. Include this strategy in a comprehensive poll worker recruitment plan
 2. Review success with Milwaukee Urban League and Alpha Kappa Alpha
 3. Secure sponsors for 10-15 sites in 2008
 - **Need increased participation of City Manager staff**
 1. Work with department heads to increase participation of city managers during 2008 elections.

ELECTION DAY STAFFING

- **Need sufficient phone coverage**
 1. Continue to coordinate the use of city employee's to provide phone coverage.
 2. Explore full-day coverage for high voter turn-out elections
- **Trouble shooters need more training**
 1. Require troubleshooters to attend the training for new Chief Inspectors
- **Absentee Ballot runners need to be reliable**
 1. Provide written expectations.
 2. Central processing of absentee ballots.

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

- **Filing registration cards**
- **Organizing campaign finance reports and candidate filing documents**
- **Organizing the department's "Common Documents" directory**
- **Update the department' web site.**