Business Practice Group Report for the 2014 General Election

The following is an executive summary of two surveys conducted by the Business Practice Group (BPG), testimonials from Clerk and Recorder's experiences during the election, and statistics captured by the counties during the 2014 General Election. The survey was designed and requested by the COVAME commission. The business practice group is a working group appointed by the COVAME commission. The members of the Business Practice Group are comprised of County Clerks, election administers and commission co-chair Elena Nunez.

The first survey's objective was to gather information about the 2014 General Election and to compare it across all county tiers; it was sent to all 64 county clerk offices. The designation of three tiers, as defined in Title 1, established the requirements for the number of Voter Service and Polling Centers (VSPCs) each county must open during a general election. Tier 1 counties have 25,000+ active voters, Tier 2 counties have 10,000-25,000 active voters, and Tier 3 counties have fewer than 10,000 active voters. Survey responses were received from 45 counties. Respondents include 14 of 15 Tier 1 counties, 10 of 14 Tier 2 counties, and 21 of 35 Tier 3 counties. See appendix A for a map of the counties that responded and appendix B for survey results.

The second survey gathered specific information about signature discrepancies; it was also sent to all 64 county clerk offices. 65% responded. See appendix C for a map of the counties that responded, appendix D for the survey results and appendix E for a summary of responses.

Appendix F includes data on voting method over time and appendix G includes registration data from the 29 days prior to and including Election Day. This cutoff date was chosen to review the impact same-day registration had on the 2014 Election.

Highlights from the 2014 Election

The 2014 General Election was the first partisan November election held under the new election model. There were accomplishments that deserve celebration and some items that present areas for improvement.

Changes with the new election model: all active voters received a ballot by mail, had in-person voting options for two weeks prior to Election day (Election day included), and could register to vote or make an address change up to and on Election Day. In previous partisan elections, those who missed the registration cutoff or did not correct their address prior to going to the polling place were required to vote a provisional ballot unless the voter visited an office or vote center with a live connection where same day changes could be made. The new election model improved voter turnout and reduced provisional ballots by 98%. While many states experienced declining turnout, Colorado's turnout improved and was the fourth highest in the nation.

WebSCORE, a new application, was developed and delivered on time by the Secretary of State's office. This application was created to help streamline in-person voting at VSPC locations by simplifying the work of the election judge. It successfully cut down the transaction time to process a voter and reduced the length and complexity of election judge training. However, technical issues with this application were encountered on Election Day, when approximately 75% of in-person votes were cast.

Due to county-developed contingency plans, when the WebSCORE system went down periodically on Election Day, lines that formed moved in an orderly fashion and the number of provisional ballots cast
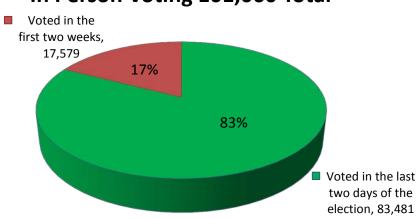
was minimal. Preventing technical issues related to the state's system is an area that needs improvement and a review is ongoing.

Methods used to vote (mail and in-person):
Colorado voters overwhelmingly continue to utilize mail ballots; only 5% chose to cast their votes in person. Nearly 2 million voters chose to mail their mail ballot or drop it off. In the survey responses, of the mail ballot voters in Tier 1 counties, 67% dropped off while 33% mailed the ballots back. In Tier 2 counties, 56% dropped off while 44% mailed the ballots back. In Tier 3 counties, 48% dropped off while 52% mailed the ballots back.

Drop boxes are a popular choice for mail ballot voters and twenty-four hour drop boxes remain very popular. Add info to this section on 24 hr. numbers from counties available. The cost of networking a camera and storing surveillance footage makes the installation of 24 hour boxes cost prohibitive in many medium and small counties and limits the number of boxes in some large counties. The BPG recommends that the surveillance policy for 24 hr boxes be reviewed and cost benefit analysis conducted. In addition to looking at the cost benefit also examine policy specific to each tier and size of county.

Five percent of voters chose an in-person method of voting. Not including provisional voters, in-person voters totaled 101,060 in number; 83,481 of whom cast their votes on the last two days of voting.

In Person Voting 101,060 Total

- Voted in the first two weeks, 17,579 — 17%
- Voted in the last two days of the election, 83,481 — 83%

Voter Service and Polling Center days and hours
The new election model used a formula based on active voter population to determine the number of VSPCs and the number of days these sites were required to be open. Counties reported that activity at VSPCs the first 11 to 12 days was very slow. Only 17% of the in-person voting took place prior to election week. Eighty-three percent of the in-person voters used a service center on the Monday prior to Election Day and on Election Day. See appendix F for county and statewide date by date information for in-person voting. The formulas for VSPCs need to be reviewed and modified to account for lower turnout the first two weeks of voting. Saturday requirements are of special note for low early turnout: only 417 in-person voters voted on October 25th and 1856 in-person voters voted on November 1st. Many counties incurred additional overtime costs in operating these weekend hours. Counties are more than willing to spend the money if voters are actually going to use the services, but in the 2014 Election voters did not utilize Saturday services.

Tier 1 counties reported challenges locating larger facilities that could meet the technical requirements for the new model and keeping staff busy at their Voter Service and Polling Centers. In addition, difficulty was encountered securing facilities for two full weeks and many locations that were available for two weeks were too small for Election Day voter turnout. Week one, October 20 to October 25, early voting turnout was especially slow. Voter turnout for tier 1 counties was 4292 voters with 81 VSPCs required for this time period. Saturday voting for tier 1 counties was 403 voters for 81 required VSPCs. Statewide, on the first Saturday, 417 voters voted at the 130 required VSPC locations. Tier 2 and Tier 3 counties were only required to have one VSPC open during the two week period leading up to Election Day, for a total of 49 locations.
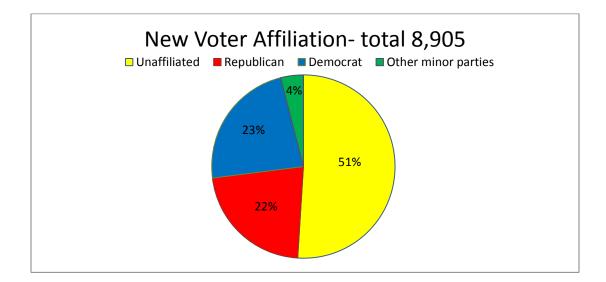
Many counties opened more service centers than were required by statute and that will continue, as they meet the needs of their communities. Additionally, many chose to open additional VSPCs on the Monday before Election Day, leaving these counties better prepared for Election Day.
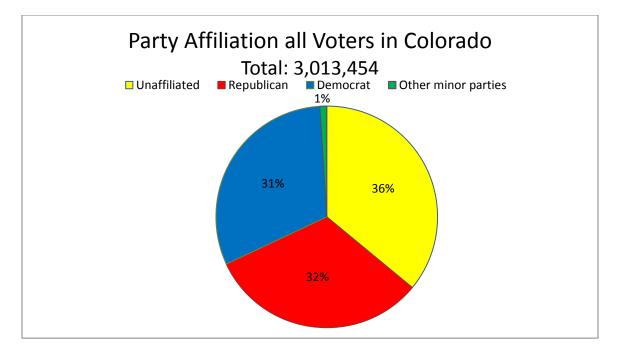
The BPG recommends adjusting the formula to require fewer service centers to be open during the first week of voting and to eliminate the first Saturday requirement.

Voter Registrations
In previous General Elections, the registration period ended 29 days before the election for new voters, but address changes for registered voters were allowed through Election Day using the emergency registration process or the provisional ballot process unless the voter visited an office or Vote Center with a live connection where same day changes could be made.

In the 2014 General Election, 60,161 people used registration updating services provided by the clerks in the last 29 days. Of those 60,161 voters, 8,905 were new voters to the state of Colorado and issued a ballot with 4754 of those new registrations occurring on Election Day. Party affiliation for new voters was 51% Unaffiliated, 22% Republican, 23% Democrat and 4% with other minor parties. Party affiliations for all 3,013,454 registered voters in Colorado are 32% unaffiliated, 36% Republican, 31% Democrat and 1% other minor parties.

New Voter Affiliation- total 8,905

Party Affiliation all Voters in Colorado
Total: 3,013,454

■ Unaffiliated ■ Republican ■ Democrat ■ Other minor parties

1%

31%

36%

32%

In another change brought about by the new election model, the state began utilizing the National Change of Address (NCOA) data from the postal service. Success was realized in list maintenance and subsequently, many counties reported that undeliverable rates decreased. In the 2013 Coordinated Election the undeliverable rate was approximately 10%. In the 2014 General Election the undeliverable rate was approximately 4%. This decrease indicates that our voter registration lists are cleaner. Additional work can be done in the area of list maintenance through improvements in integrating NCOA with Electronic Registration Information Center project (ERIC) data. The Colorado Department of Revenue (CDOR) Motor Voter program can also be improved with additional integration. Undeliverable addresses were compared against CDOR driver's license data and 28% of those addresses could have been updated to a more current address if address changes were automated between CDOR and WebSCORE. The BPG is hopeful that the planned software upgrade will significantly increase the success of the national motor voter program. The process for the transfer of information from CDOR to the SOS in an electronic format needs to be improved to provide more efficient data and better serve the public.

Provisional Ballots:
Under the new election model, voters were allowed to change their address or to register up to and including Election Day. This resulted in a 98% decrease in provisional ballots. The number of rejected provisional ballots stayed consistent. The ineligible voters who attempted to vote continue to be managed through the provisional process. Provisional ballots numbers could have been further reduced if the technical issues had not arisen with WebSCORE on Election Day. Of the 981 provisional ballots cast statewide, 387 were due to the loss of connectivity or the inability to verify a voter's eligibility as a result of the WebSCORE disruption. See appendix H for a breakdown of provisional ballots cast statewide in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 elections.

As a result of the new model, the reduction in provisional ballots was a large cost savings for the counties and provided easier access for voters to vote a regular ballot. Post-election staff time was greatly reduced because the process to update and register voters during the voting process was much more efficient and effective. The average cost to issue and process provisional ballots is about $10 per ballot. In the 2010 election, the cost to process provisional ballots was $412,320. This year the cost to process provisional ballots for the 2014 General Election was $9810. Additional information can be found in appendix H.

Election Judges
Because the new model eliminated traditional polling places, the number of election judges required was substantially reduced. Even so, the laws surrounding recruitment of election judges need to be updated. The recruitment and selection process outlined in law results in election judges who are suited for a system used 20 years ago rather than our current system. In addition, some counties reported difficulty in using caucus referrals to procure judges who could accommodate extended training, extended work schedules (2 to 4 weeks long), and meet the technical skills required. The BPG would recommend that the Clerk and Recorders, Secretary of State and political parties work together to update election judge statutes.

Costs
Many of the changes in the new model are reducing costs. For example, fewer provisional votes saves approximately $10 per vote in materials and processing labor. Reducing the number of undeliverable ballots also saves in materials, postage and labor. The BPG would like to put together a more comprehensive cost comparison after the Secretary of State's reimbursement forms for the 2014 General are complete.

Signature Verification
The new election model introduced a higher volume of mail ballot voting in a General Election in Colorado. Signature verification continues to be a key part of the election process. In this election, nearly 2 million signatures were reviewed and verified for a match with a current signature on file in the statewide voter registration system. Of those signatures, 1,973,878 signatures were accepted resulting in the counting of those ballots. As with any statewide election that includes mail balloting, some signatures could not be verified by election judge and were deemed discrepant. Statute gives the voter an opportunity to cure this discrepancy up to and including eight days after Election Day.

In a recent survey conducted by the BPG about signature discrepancies during the 2014 General Election, the counties responding to this survey reported that sending a letter stating there was an issue with the voter's signature (signature cure) resulted in over 42% of the ballots being counted. The 42 counties responded with the following data; 2,822 missing signature letters were sent and 1,428 were cured; 9,913 signature discrepancy (signature does not match record in SCORE) letters were sent and 3,559 were cured; 1,846 letters asking for identification were sent and 338 were provided and cured.

Statute requires that those ballots whose signature is discrepant and cannot be resolved, be sent to the District Attorney for review for potential fraud. In general, there appears to be only a few cases where ill intentions may be involved. Of the 5,388 cases referred to the DA by the 42 counties who responded to the survey, 12 cases, out of more than 2 million ballots cast, appear to qualify for review of malicious activity by the District Attorney. Signature verification continues to be a good safeguard against fraud.

Additional information on signature verification and signature cures may be found in appendix C, D, and E.

<u>**Technical Applications**</u>
The new in-person voting application, WebSCORE, was developed by the Secretary of State's office. The application was created to help streamline in-person voting at VSPC locations by simplifying the work of the election judge. It was successful in cutting down the transaction time to process a voter and reducing the length and complexity of election judge training. Technical issues with this application were encountered on Election Day and the Secretary of State's office has hired a third party to investigate the root cause of these issues.

As reported by the counties on Election Day, the On-line Voter Registration application went down intermittently throughout the day as did the WebSCORE application. Most counties reported that the full version of the WebSCORE application (citrix based connection) remained steady except for a few minutes around 2:00 p.m. when the Secretary of State's office attempted to 'reset' the database to restore normal application behavior.

One positive note coming from this experience includes verification that the counties have established effective plans for continued voting during times of connectivity loss. Some counties offered mail ballots during this disruption, while most counties had voters vote provisionally or wait until the VSPC application came back up. Counties also reported outstanding support from the SOS SCORE help desk.

The statewide Election Night Reporting (ENR) application also experienced issues intermittently on election night. This was particularly frustrating for people tracking tight statewide races. SOE, the vendor who provides this service to the Secretary of State and their software had issues nationwide. Note: SOE is not associated with the technical issues experienced in the actual voting system application; SOE is a completely separate infrastructure. The BPG recommends a separate root-cause investigation for the ENR system.

Recommendations from BPG

Improve the Motor Voter registration
To begin, the motor voter program needs to automatically transfer voter registration information from the state driver's license program to the state voter registration system; this must include both in-office and online transactions. In addition, citizens should be asked not only if they'd like to register to vote, but also if registered voters would like to update their registration information if they're making a name and/or address change.

Currently, if a voter is already registered and making an address and/or name change to their driver's license, they are not asked to update their voter registration. Consequently, this information does not get transferred to the voter registration system.

Improve VSPC communications
Communications to all locations and Election Judge leads is challenging in larger counties. Including a messaging tool in the VSPC module or utilizing mass text communications should be investigated for future elections.

Improve password management
A number of counties found password management between systems to be cumbersome and difficult.

Improve test environment differentiation
A suggestion was made to make the sandbox or test environment a completely different color from the live environment. This would prevent counties from accidentally working in the test environment when they should be using the live WebSCORE application.

Increase 24 hr Ballot Boxes
Twenty-four hour boxes are extremely popular with voters. The cost of networking a camera and storing surveillance footage makes the installation of 24 hour boxes cost prohibitive in many medium and small counties and limits the number of boxes in some large counties. The BPG recommends that the surveillance policy for 24 hr boxes be reviewed and cost benefit analysis conducted. In addition to looking at the cost benefit also examine policy specific to each tier and size of county.

VSPC Days, Hours and number required
The Voter Service and Polling Center formulas need to be reviewed. At a minimum the first week of voting, first Saturday of voting and the number of sites needs to be reduced and a new formula created.

Election Judge Recruitment and Selection
All counties reported challenges with recruiting the quantity and the quality judges need for the new election model. The BPG recommends the current process of recruiting judges through the caucus process be reviewed and a new process created.

Appendices

Appendix A- Map of 2014 General Election survey respondents
Appendix B- 2014 General Election Survey results
Appendix C- Map of 2014 General Election Signature Discrepancy survey respondents
Appendix D- 2014 General Election Signature Discrepancy survey results
Appendix E- 2014 General Election Summary of the Signature Discrepancy survey
Appendix F-2014 General Election Vote by Method Report
Appendix G- 2014 General Election Voter Registration Information
Appendix H- Summary of Provisional Data from the 2010, 2012 and 2014 General Elections