POST-ELECTION REVIEW
May 1, 2021 Joint Election

Introduction

Beginning in January 2021, the Elections Department began conducting a comprehensive internal review of its overall operations. The results of that review and its corresponding actions were planned to be released in three phases.

Phase I was a review of the Department's reporting structure and its plans for reorganizing that structure. The review found multiple problems with the existing structure, and as a result, a new organizational structure was implemented in March of 2021. In the new structure, employees were put into team environments where they worked together rather than in silos and were given clear responsibilities and duties. This transition has been highly successful and has also cured many internal communications problems. However, the full effectiveness of the new structure won't be realized until eleven vacancies are filled, including the Deputy Elections Administrator and four key management positions.

Phase II of the internal review included a short term plan to review existing Elections Department processes and to make any immediate changes needed to conduct the May 1, Joint Election and the June 5, Joint Runoff Election. More extensive, but desired, modifications to existing election processes could not be accomplished before the election because of a shortage of staff and the Department's involvement in several other critical long-term projects. The short-term modifications to existing election processes was presented to Commissioners Court on April 6, 2021. This document reports on the success of those modifications as well as the success and issues related to existing processes that were utilized for the May 1, Joint Election.

Phase III of the internal review will include a comprehensive analysis of the organization including its personnel, processes, procedures, vendors, facilities, software, and technical infrastructure. That analysis and a long term strategic plan will be presented to Commissioners Court and the Dallas County Election Commission in the summer of 2021 after management staff has been hired to assist in that review

Election Plan Overview / Modifications

The 2021 Joint Election was conducted for 32 participating jurisdictions and was the largest May Joint Election in the County's history. It was conducted for 1.3 million voters and utilized 58 Early Voting vote centers and 432 Election Day vote centers. To staff those vote centers, an unprecedented 2,000 poll workers were recruited and employed on this May Election Day.

Existing Processes – The election was mostly conducted using the existing election processes and infrastructure historically used by the Elections Department. While many problematic issues were previously identified with these processes after the 2020 Presidential Election, only the highest priority issues were addressed before the Joint Election.

Modification of Processes – The following sections contain a brief description of the problematic issues and the implemented modifications of processes. Those issues and modifications are listed by Elections Department Divisions and Departments.

DALLAS COUNTY ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT

Administration Department

The billing process for participating jurisdictions was modified in several ways for the Joint Election because of certain problematic issues that are listed below:

1. **New Election Equipment Issue -** When the Elections Department purchased new election equipment in 2019, it did not change the price list it uses to charge jurisdictions that contract for its services. Thus, it failed to correctly charge participating jurisdictions for the use of that new equipment. This issue was identified both internally and later in a Review by the County Auditor.

   - **Modification #1** - The Elections Department proposed, and the Commissioners Court approved, a new price list in February 2021 and that price list is being utilized for the Joint Election.

     o This modification was successful because the County is no longer missing out on revenue used to pay for voting equipment. On the other hand, participating jurisdictions are not pleased with their increased costs.

     o Short-term plan – Develop a new 2021 alternative price list that presents more billing options for Commissioners Court to consider.

     o Long-term plan – Following the Auditor's Office recommendation, review and submit price list changes on an annual basis.

2. **Poll Worker Expense Issue** – Prior to the 2020 Presidential Election, in response to a shortage of workers because of COVID 19, Commissioners Court approved an increase in poll worker pay from $10 per hour to $16 per hour for clerks and from $12 per hour to $18 per hour for Judges.

   - **Modification #2** – It was determined that no modifications would be made to poll worker payroll amounts.

     o Short and long term plans – review poll worker wages on an annual basis.

3. **Vote Center Model Issue** – When the County utilized a new state law to implement vote centers in place of traditional polling places, it formed a Vote Center Advisory Committee that met in the summer of 2019. The Committee made a recommendation to use the same number of vote centers as the number of polling places used in prior elections. Commissioners' Court approved that plan and it was implemented in all elections since November of 2019. The result of that plan was that the 2021 Joint Election would have nearly 100 more voting locations than in previous joint elections and thus significantly higher expenses that would need to be charged to participating jurisdictions.

   - **Modification #3** - The Elections Department moved to immediately cut costs by reviewing its existing contracts and negotiating $238,000 in concessions from one vendor for past hardware/software issues, cancelled a contract for unneeded curbside voting equipment worth approximately $450,000, and negotiated a $12,000 reduction in software development costs from vendor.

     o This modification was successful because these cuts will result in indirect savings to participating jurisdictions this year and for future elections.

     o Long-term plans – The Elections Department will continue to re-evaluate all hardware and software contracts and look for savings that will both benefit the County and participating jurisdictions.

     o See Modification #10 below for more direct cost reductions.

4. **Cost Distribution Methodology Issue** – When vote centers were implemented in Dallas County, the methodology used to distribute the costs to the jurisdictions needed to be changed but the change never took place.

- **Modification #4** - The Elections Department modified the methodology to charge jurisdictions by utilizing the methodology implemented in the majority of Texas counties that use vote centers.

  o This modification was successful because costs are now fairly and consistently distributed between participating jurisdictions. However, some jurisdictions who benefitted from the old methodology are not happy about the new methodology or the increased costs associated with 1 through 3 above.

  o Short term plan – Utilize the current methodology for the Joint Runoff Election.

  o Long-term plan - Review the methodology annually as part of the budgeting process.

Communications Department

5. **VIP Communications Issue** - In the past, key stakeholders, including participating jurisdictions, the media, and elected officials were provided with various landline and mobile numbers of staff members who received calls and worked diligently to provide information in a timely fashion. Issues were handled by the staff member who answered the phone rather than distributing assignments to various departments on Election Day.

- **Modification #5** – The Communications Department implemented a new phone bank for participating jurisdictions, elected officials, political parties, candidates, and the media called the VIP Hotline.

  o This modification was successful in increasing the capacity to answer calls, prioritize, and address all issues. Most importantly, it allowed for systematic addressing of critical issues first.

6. **Hotline Issue –** Historically, the processes associated with phone banks were in need of a more organized and orderly effort.

- **Modification #6 –** The Communications Department implemented a revised Judge Hotline, and a revised Voter Hotline.

  o This modification created multiple phone banks and response teams that allowed for a clear separation of duties within each department. Issues are recorded by an incoming phone bank and resolved by the appropriate response team. The use of a Customer Help Desk ticket system allowed for data collection to be used for the future improvement of processes.

Operations Division

Training Department

7. **Training Consistency Issue** – Training was historically presented orally by several trainers who sometimes presented the information inconsistently.

- **Modification #7** – The Training Department made a minor change in how existing training materials were presented in class by utilizing a recorded PowerPoint presentation rather than a

live verbal presentation.

- o This modification was successful because training is now consistently presented and the strain on the trainers has been reduced.

- o Short-term plan – For the Joint Runoff Election, the Department will send an electronic refresher-training document that will highlight identified poll worker errors and provide guidance to prevent those same errors for the Joint Election.

- o Long-term plan – The Elections Department will review and revise all Vote Center processes and will design a comprehensive new training program to be implemented for all future elections beginning in November.

Mail Ballot Department

8. **Signature Verification Issue** – The Mail Ballot Department processed voted mail ballot envelopes using an antiquated, labor-intensive, paper based process that caused major cost overruns that ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars in the 2020 Presidential Election.

- • **Modification #8** – The Mail Ballot Department made a major modification in the way it processes mail ballots by switching to a process where the signatures on voted mail ballots and mail ballot applications are moved between departments electronically and ballot envelopes are sorted using state of the art technology.

  - o This modification was highly successful and resulted in a much faster process, a major cut in labor costs in the Mail Ballot Department as well as on the Signature Verification Board.

  - o Long-term plan – The Department will develop better signature verification training and will explore utilizing a vendor to mail out ballot packets with the hope of streamlining the process and saving taxpayer dollars.

Voting Sites Department

9. **Early Voting / Election Day Department Issue** – Previously, two separate departments managed voting locations and the poll workers who ran those locations, resulting in inconsistent processes and training for each and a redundancy in labor.

- • **Modification #9** - Combined Early Voting and Election Day Departments into a single Voting Sites Department.

  - o This modification was highly successful because it eliminated waste and brought consistency to how voting sites were run for the Joint Election.

10. **Equipment Distribution Issue** - Equipment and Personnel were historically distributed using rough averages resulting in underutilization and overutilization of equipment and personnel, which ultimately resulted in higher election costs for the County and participating jurisdictions.

- • **Modification #10** – The Elections Department modified its plan for distributing equipment, personnel, and supplies to polling places by successfully using analytics to project voter turnout overall, and at the vote centers. For the Joint Election, we projected turnout of 130,000 including 6,000 mail ballot voters, 65,000 early voters, and 59,000 Election Day voters. Actual turnout was 128,084, including 5,100 mail ballot voters, 65,504 early voters, and 57,472 Election Day voters.

The overall turnout projections were then used to predict how many voters would turnout at each vote center and an appropriate amount of personnel, equipment, and supplies were distributed to each location. The result of this modification is a projected direct savings to participating jurisdictions of over $500,000.

- o Short-term plan – Use the same successful analytics model for the Joint Runoff Election.
- o Long-term plan – Expand the use of analytics to further analyze voter behavior and safely further reduce deployment of equipment and personnel.

11. **Vote Center Oversite Issue** – In the past roving technicians were placed in a Sheriff's vehicle and assigned a route where they visited vote centers. Their job was to inspect the procedures at the location as well as troubleshoot technical problems at the location. In reality, nearly all of their time was spent troubleshooting technical problems and very little time providing oversite of the vote centers.

- **Modification #11** – For the Joint election, the duties of the Roving Technicians were separated and performed by two groups. Inspectors were assigned to a route and focused on election procedures and how to use technical equipment. Technicians were stationed throughout the County in Sheriff's vehicles and were deployed to troubleshoot technical problems, replace faulty hardware, and deliver missing supplies.
  - o This modification mostly worked well as the Inspectors were able to provide good oversight and mentorship to Election Judges. This was especially needed for this election because of the high number of new Judges working on Election Day.
  - o Short-term plan – The desired number of deployed Technicians for this election was twenty. However, because of a shortage of temporary labor to fill these roles, only fourteen were available to serve on Election Day resulting in slower service than desired to certain locations. For the Joint Runoff Election, the number of Technicians will remain at around fourteen, but because there are less than one-half as many vote centers for this election, the number of technicians should be adequate.
  - o Long-term plan – After gathering more accurate statistics about Election Day issues and the time it takes to service those issues, the Department will use analytics to predict staffing needs for Technicians and Inspectors.

Logistics Department

12. **Equipment and Supply Preparation Issues** – Warehouse personnel previously managed electronic election equipment as well as the preparation of supplies and equipment. This span of duties was too broad and required knowledge of technology above the classifications utilized in the Warehouse Department. The Department also operated out of three different warehouses making oversite of operations difficult. The result was substandard preparations of materials, inventory control, and management of technology assets.

- **Modification #12 –** The duties of the Warehouse team were split where duties related to technology management were given to the Technology Division, and logistics duties were given to the newly formed Logistics Department.

- o The modification regarding the narrowing the scope of duties was partially successful. However, nagging supply preparation issues continue to plague this department and a major overhaul of supply preparation procedures are needed.

13. **Equipment and Supply Distribution Issue –** Election judges were burdened with picking up election supplies such as PPE, extra printers, and certain signage that could have been delivered to polling locations, resulting in Judges refusing to accept assignments because of the extra burden on them.

   - **Modification #13** – The Logistics Department was assigned the duty of delivering all supplies to polling locations except for the Judge's shoulder bag and electronic poll books. The processes associated with the extra printers were modified and the printers were eliminated.

     - o This modification was greatly appreciated by Election Judges and the elimination of printers at the vote centers was successful and caused no issues.

Election Technology Division

Central Count Department

14. **Vendor Reliance Issue –** The Elections Department had grown reliant on ES&S, an election vendor, to perform a large number of tasks that could have been performed by Central Count Staff. The high cost of ES&S staff ($1,650 per day) resulted in unnecessary election costs and fostered some mistrust by election activists who believe election tasks should be under the control of Elections Department employees rather than vendors.

   - **Modification #14** – The Elections Department transitioned certain central count tasks from ES&S employees to Central Count Staff members.

     - o This modification was highly successful as Central Count Staff successfully learned and performed duties previously performed by ES&S, resulting in thousands of dollars in saving for this election and which will ultimately save the County hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Activists who regularly monitor Central Count activities applauded this modification.

     - o Long-term plan – ES&S will continue to transition Central Count responsibilities to Central Count Staff for future elections.

15. **Ballot Transportation Issue –** Historically, the Elections Department's procedure for a Judge at a Vote Center to return voted ballots to Central Count was for the Judge to bring the Primary and Backup USB results sticks, along with the paper ballots, to a regional site. From there the results from the Primary USB were modemed in to Central Count and used as preliminary results. Then, all three ballot types were trucked back to Central Count where the Backup USB was read and counted as the official election results.

   This process was identified as problematic because all election results were transported together. This "all eggs in one basket" approach does not follow elections best practices because if the results from one Judge's vehicle did not make it back to a Regional site, the integrity of the entire election would be in question**.**

   - **Modification #15** – Only the Primary USB and the paper ballots were transported to the Regional site. The Backup USB was left sealed in the election equipment at the Vote Center to be picked up over the next couple of weeks by a trucking company. Because Texas law

considers a results stick that touches the internet to be unreliable and unusable as official results, the results from the Primary stick were not modemed in to Central Count. Instead, they were driven back in waves from the Regional Sites so that election results were posted in a timely fashion.

- o This modification was not understood by some who may value speed of results over reliability because it delayed final election results from 30 to 60 minutes. Nonetheless, it was the correct and responsible thing to do because the loss of election results from a vote center would be catastrophic.

- o Short-term plan – Continue using this modification but make the public aware that election results may be somewhat slower than in previous elections.

16. **Unscheduled Result Release Times Issue** – Previously, election results were released randomly at any minute of any hour resulting in citizens not knowing when the next set of results would be released.

- **Modification #16 –** Early voting election results were released at 7 pm and Election Day results were released at precisely 9 pm and every 30 minutes thereafter.

   - o This modification was successful as many people commented that they appreciated knowing the exact time the next batch of results would be released.

   - o Short and long-term plans – Continue the practice of releasing results at regularly scheduled times.

Election Hardware Department

17. **Election Technology Preparation Issue –** As stated earlier, the management of election technology equipment was previously performed by warehouse personnel, which proved to be less than ideal.

- **Modification #17 –** Selected members of the Warehouse team were transferred to the Elections Hardware Department and were placed under the supervision of a supervisor with a technical background.

   - o This modification proved to be very successful in that the equipment was better prepared than in the past. However, a severe shortage of labor provided by temporary staffing agencies created tremendous strain on the staff to make up for lost hours resulting in less than perfect performance.

   - o Short-term plan – The temporary staffing agencies have provided adequate staffing for the June Runoff election and the preparation of equipment should be improved.

Election Operations Performance Evaluation

This was the largest Joint Election operation in Dallas County's history with 58 Early Voting sites (53 in 2019) and 432 Election Day Vote Centers (335 in 2019) and over 2,000 poll workers. Voters also had many more opportunities to vote as they could vote at any of the 432 locations rather than a single assigned precinct as in past elections. This equated to a significant increase in net available voting hours. In 2019, there were 4,399 Early Voting hours and in 2021 there were 4,814 voting hours. On Election Day in 2019, there were 4,020 voting hours and in 2021 there were 5,184 voting hours. All told, this equates to an increase of almost 20% more voting hours in 2021 than in 2019.

As stated previously, this election was conducted using mostly existing processes, but seventeen

modifications to those processes were implemented to alleviate anticipated problems and to improve operations. Overall, most election operations were performed well by a dedicated staff who tried to make significant improvements in a very short period of time. In addition, the Department's election costs were cut significantly when compared to past elections.

Despite the overall success of the election, there is still much room for improvement. On Election Day, the Department encountered the typical poll opening problems most election offices face, but those problems were magnified publicly when several Vote Centers didn't open for several hours, which is an unacceptable level of performance. This situation exasperated certain officials because some of these opening issues took place in districts where there were highly competitive, high profile races.

Below is a summary of certain issues documented on Election Day in the "Ask Ed" Help Desk software that is used to track Election Day calls from poll workers. This election was the first election the Ask Ed system has been fully utilized to document all Election Day issues. Election staff is analyzing these issues in order to make improvements for future elections. The issues are categorized by the major systems and processes utilized to prepare for, and conduct Election Day operations.

Election Day Systems / Processes

Legal Framework

1. **Texas Election Code** - The elections structure required by the Texas Election Code varies from many states and presents various challenges to staffing vote centers and managing processes at vote centers. However, those variances are out of the control of the Dallas County Elections Department and they are manageable with more extensive planning and ongoing management.

   - Long-term plan – Work with Dallas County and local area election advocates to assist legislators in enacting more voter-friendly election laws.

Election Day Process Design

2. **Process Design Issues** – Many of the Department's current processes, procedures, guides, and forms utilized to conduct elections are remnants of the processes utilized when the County conducted polling place elections. As a result, many processes are antiquated paper based processes that make Election Day operations less than optimal. It is not clear from the Ask Ed Help Desk which tickets are directly related to process design but the assumption is that many of the tickets tagged as election procedures, polling place issues, voter registration issues, and "other" issues may be related.

   - Long-term plan – The Elections Department will review and revise all Vote Center processes and implement new processes in time for the 2021 November Election.

Election Equipment

There were 585 tickets in the Ask Ed Help Desk ticketing system. Of those, 39% of the tickets (226) were related to Election Hardware.

3. **Electronic Poll book Issues** – The Elections Department deployed 1,390 electronic poll books to 432 vote centers on Election Day. Ten percent (43 tickets) of the locations had issues with the poll books. Of the 43 tickets, 10% were related to improper preparation, 30% were user error issues, 10% were training issues, and 50% were technical issues.

   - Short-term plan – Continue to work with ES&S to fix minor technical poll book issues and provide supplemental instructions to poll workers to avoid user errors.

- Long-term plan – Work with ES&S to provide additional electronic applications within the poll books to better manage Election Day operations.

4. **"Connect" Software Issue** – Connect is a software application used in conjunction with Cradlepoint software to monitor the status of electronic poll books. For various reasons, the software did not provide the "online" and "offline" status of certain e-poll books, thereby limiting the Department's ability to see which locations were up and running.

- Short-term plan – Work with ES&S and Cradlepoint to determine why Connect was not functioning properly and to fix the problem.

- Establish a new Poll Book Monitoring team staffed by Dallas County IT staff members to actively monitor the status of electronic poll book connectivity.

5. **ExpressVote Issues –** The Elections Department deployed nearly 2,000 Express Vote voting machines to 432 vote centers on Election Day. There were 78 tickets logged (4% of deployed machines) with issues related to the Express Votes. Of those, 50% were related to improper preparation, 20% were user error issues, 10% were training issues, and 10% were technical issues.

- Short-term plan – Work with temporary agencies to provide timely staffing in order to properly prepare the Express Votes for deployment.

6. **DS200 Issues –** The Elections Department deployed 432 DS 200 machines on Election Day. There were 59 tickets (13.6% of deployed machines) with issues related to the DS 200. Of those, 10% were related to improper preparation, 50% were user error, 30% were training issues, and 10% were technical issues.

- Short-term plan – Provide supplemental instructions to poll workers to enhance training and avoid user errors.

7. **ExpressVote Printer Issues** – The Elections Department deployed nearly 2,000 ExpressVote printers on Election Day. There were 25 tickets related to the ExpressVote Printers. Of those, 5% were related to improper preparation, 5% were user errors, 10% were training, and 80% were technical issues related to a Microsoft and ES&S software conflict that randomly disconnected the printers.

- Short-term plan and/or Long-term plan – Work with ES&S to install a Microsoft patch to fix the issue and if not implemented in time for the Joint Runoff Election, provide additional documentation to poll workers on procedures to cope with the issue.

Personnel

8. **Poll Worker Recruitment Issue** – Recruiting poll workers to work on a Saturday in May is always very difficult. This year was even more difficult than in past years because of COVID 19 and because of the increase in voting locations. For this election, we had to recruit workers for nearly 100 more voting locations than in past elections. To staff the 432 locations, we had to replace 156 Election Judges.

There were 33 issues related to poll workers documented in the Ask Ed Help Desk on Election Day. However, many other poll worker issues were dealt with directly by Voting Sites Department staff.

- Short-term plan – The reduced number of vote centers (203) for the June Runoff Election should relieve some of the recruiting stress.

- Long-term plan – Work to recruit and train a larger pool of backup poll workers for future

elections.

9. **Temporary Worker Issue** – Agencies who provide temporary workers for the Elections Department struggled to find workers willing to work for short periods of time this election season. As a result, the Election Hardware and Logistics teams lost thousands of productive hours expected to be performed by temporary workers. These hours had to be made up through expedited procedures and overtime that ultimately hurt the quality of the teams' work product. There were no issues documented in the Ask Ed Help Desk system related to temporary workers. Though, the problems related to missing temps are reflected in other areas of this document.

- Short-term plan – Continue to work with the temp agencies to adjust working hours, wages, and conditions to entice temporary workers to seek employment in the Elections Department.

- Long-term plan – Work with County administrators to explore using County employees as back-up workers as needed.

Training

10. **Updated Training Issue** – The Elections Department trains thousands of poll workers to perform duties at vote centers on Election Day. Much of the training materials and methods used need to be updated to conform to election best practices for teaching adult learners and to properly instruct workers on expected new processes to be employed at vote centers in the future. There are no issues documented in the Ask Ed Help Desk directly related to training issues. However, a significant number of issues in all areas can be tied to deficiencies in the current training program.

- Short-term plan – Send a brief training update to assigned poll workers for the Joint Runoff election that provides further guidance on the most problematic issues from the May 1 Joint Election.

- Long-term plan – Conduct a complete overhaul of the training process to be implemented for the 2021 November election.

Logistics

11. **Supply Issues** – The Logistics Department prepared and delivered equipment and supplies to 432 Vote Centers prior to Election Day and collected that same equipment and supplies after the election. There were approximately 200 tickets in the Ask Ed Help Desk system that may be related to the Logistics team's activities. Of those, 100 were related to supply issues, 22 ballot supply issues, 23 polling place issues, and 64 "other" issues that may be related.

- Short term plan – The most critical supply ticket issues will be evaluated to determine short term fixes to prevent the issues from reoccurring.

- Long-term plan – The County has acquired the property next door to the existing Elections Department Operations Facility and the Logistics Department will make that building its new home. At that location, there will be room to properly store and prepare election materials. When the new location is opened, the Department will revisit the management structure of the Department and will revise the processes utilized to prepare election supplies and materials.

Election Day Managements

12. **Ask Ed Issues** - Ask Ed is a Help Desk Ticketing System used by phone bank teams to log calls from poll

workers and other field workers on Election Day. Once the tickets are logged, members of Response Teams evaluate and prioritize the tickets and take appropriate actions to address the issue identified in the tickets.

Historically, this software was underutilized and most Election Day calls were never logged in the system. In addition, the system was never customized to accommodate the needs of Dallas County. The result of that underutilization was that statistics from the system weren't analyzed and used to develop solutions to problems encountered on Election Day. And the lack of customization of the software made the use of the system awkward and difficult.

Because the system had never been fully utilized, the deficiencies in the system were never identified in the past or addressed prior to the Joint Election. Thus, going into the 2021 Joint Election, the system was not ready to handle the demands placed on it. As a result, some users had difficulty using the system and some tickets were misfiled in obsolete folders which prevented the response teams from acting on them in a timely manner.

- Short-term plan

    o Assign the newly hired Phone Bank Coordinator to work with AskEd developers and trainers to update and simplify the interfaces and filing systems used by the phone bank teams.

    o Conduct modified training session for Ask Ed users and conduct a "mock election" to practice using the updated system.

    o Analyze the data collected from the Joint Election to determine root causes of Election Day problems and modify processes accordingly.

- Long-term plan – Explore alternative or customized help desk solutions that more adequately serves the Department's needs.