Final Review Report

Election Procedures Review
Of
Garfield County
State of Washington
2008 Primary Election

Conducted by the
Office of the Secretary of State
Election Certification and Training Program

Issued February 2009

Introduction

The Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 1992 mandating that the Office of the Secretary of State review county election procedures and practices. The Election Certification and Training Program was established within the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State to conduct reviews and to provide for the certification of election administrators. In 2005, the Legislature expanded the Election Certification and Training Program to require that each County Auditor's Office be reviewed at least once every three years. The Legislature also added a requirement that the Program conduct a follow-up visit to verify that the County Auditor's Office has taken steps to correct the problems noted in the report.

The election review process is governed by RCW 29A.04.510 through 29A.04.590 and Chapter 434-260 of the Washington Administrative Code.

Pursuant to RCW 29A.04.570(1)(b), the Election Certification and Training Program conducted an election review in Garfield County during the 2008 Primary Election cycle. Miriam Campbell, Elections Program Specialist, and Sheryl Moss, Manager and Elections Specialist represented the Election Certification and Training Program during the review. Donna Deal, Garfield County Auditor, and other members of the staff participated on behalf of the Garfield County Auditor's Office.

Both the reviewer and the Garfield County Elections Department approached the review in a spirit of cooperation. The department allowed the reviewer to thoroughly review and examine all aspects of the election processes. The staff provided documentation and materials during the review which greatly contributed to a successful examination process.

The purpose of this review report is to provide the Garfield County Elections Department with a useful evaluation of its election procedures and policies and to encourage procedural consistency in the administration of elections throughout the state. This review report includes a series of recommendations and/or suggestions that are intended to assist the Garfield County Elections Department in improving and enhancing its election processes.

The reviewer is statutorily prohibited from making any evaluation, finding, or recommendation regarding the validity of any primary or election, or of any canvass of the election returns. Consequently, this review report should not be interpreted as affecting the validity of the outcome of any election or of any canvass of election returns.

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Overview

Situated in the wide open prairie-like region of Southeastern Washington, Garfield County is home to 1,479 registered voters. While it is one of the least populated counties in our state, it proudly boasts one of the highest voter turnout percentages. Garfield County's vote by mail environment has served its rural communities well.

The Garfield County Auditor's Office is located within the historic county courthouse in the heart of Pomeroy, Washington. In addition to the Honorable Donna Deal, Garfield County Auditor, the Auditor's Office consists of Peggy Laughery, Chief Deputy, and Tina Keller, Deputy. During the elections cycle, one employee from another office is called upon to assist with ballot processing. The permanent staff of three performs all the functions of the County Auditor's Office, including elections, drawing from its depth of experience and expertise.

In the course of this review, the reviewer observed pre-election tasks, election procedures, post-election procedures, canvassing, and certification of the election. The reviewer also examined all written procedures and documents generated for the election. The staff willingly provided verbal explanations if the reviewer made a request.

Garfield County's last elections review was conducted in 2003. Since that time, our state has made significant improvements in election administration. There have been 180 changes to state election law and 1,100 administrative rule changes; keeping up with all the modifications can be challenging for county elections departments.

For this report, Garfield County was reviewed while conducting our state's first ever Top 2 Primary. The elections department is to be commended for successfully implementing many new procedures in order to administer the Primary Election. Despite the short amount of time to prepare for the new type of primary, Garfield's ballot packet materials were in excellent compliance.

The Garfield County Elections Department demonstrates excellent reconciliation procedures, conscientious ballot security measures, and friendly public service. Through its outreach efforts, the department assists the local high school with its election of student body officers. It also exhibits a strong desire to update its procedures and public notices. The staff's positive attitude is evident and its openness to suggestions has already enhanced the department's efforts to improve compliance with election laws.

The following recommendations and suggestions will help Garfield County update and further refine its elections policies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations identify areas in which the county is out of compliance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), the Washington State Constitution, or Federal election law. The reviewer obtained information based on actual observation of a procedure, verbal explanation or written procedures. The reviewer provides a description of the county's procedure, a citation of the applicable law, and a recommendation based on the citation.

Questionnaire to Cities, Towns, and Districts

The Garfield County Auditor contacts its jurisdictions by phone to confirm current election information. The department notifies those jurisdictions which they believe will have an election. The department does not send a questionnaire to all of its jurisdictions to confirm salaries, incumbents, and offices up for election. The information on the offices up for election and open for filing is not disseminated to the public.

WAC 434-215-005 requires, "Prior to March 1 of each year, the county auditor shall send a questionnaire to the administrative authority of each local jurisdiction for which the auditor is the candidate filing officer subject to the provisions of RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330. The purpose of the questionnaire shall be to confirm information which the auditor may disseminate to the public regarding the filing for elective offices. The questionnaire should request, at a minimum, confirmation of offices to be filled at the general election that year, the name of the incumbent, and the annual salary for the position at the time of the filing period. Reponses should be received prior to April 1 of that year so that the filing information can be compiled and disseminated to the public at least two weeks prior to the candidate filing period."

Recommendation: The Garfield County Elections Department must send all local jurisdictions a questionnaire every year, prior to March 1, and disseminate the returned information to the public when the offices are open for candidate filing. The questionnaire will assist the County Auditor in both obtaining accurate information and providing documentation to the public as necessary.

Voters Requiring Verification of Identity

The Garfield County Auditor contacts voters requiring verification of identity by telephone. The elections department does not mail these voters a notice with a list of acceptable forms of identification.

WAC 434-250-045(1) requires, "If the voter registration record of an absentee voter is flagged as requiring verification of identity, a notice must be sent at the time of the election explaining that a photocopy of identification must be provided in order for the ballot to be counted, and listing what forms of identification are acceptable."

WAC 434-324-045(4) states, "If the applicant votes absentee, he or she must be notified that the ballot will not be counted unless he or she provides adequate verification of identity."

Recommendation: The elections department must send notices to voters who need to provide identification. The notice should be in substantially the same form as prescribed in WAC 434-324-045 and 434-250-045. The department may continue to extend the courtesy of a phone call, but the notice will provide documentation for both the voter and the County Auditor's Office when further information is needed to count a voted ballot. The notice must list acceptable forms of identification and be sent at the time of registration and the next election.

Confirmation Notice

When the Garfield County Auditor receives a response to a Confirmation Notice indicating a voter has moved outside of the county, but remains in the state, the elections department cancels the voter's registration. The elections department does not place the voter on inactive status pending acceptance by the new county.

The notice currently states, "If you have moved to a different county, please mark the box on the return postcard so that we can cancel your voter registration." The voter is asked to mark the box and then sign, thereby cancelling his or her registration. The notice does not provide prepaid postage and it refers to "polls" which are no longer relevant in Garfield County.

RCW 29A.08.640 states, "If the response indicates a move out of the county, but within the state, the auditor shall place the voter on inactive status for transfer pending acceptance by the new county indicated by the new address. The auditor shall immediately notify the auditor of the county with the new address."

RCW 29A.08.030(3) indicates, " 'Confirmation notice' means a notice sent to a registered voter by first-class forwardable mail at the address indicated on the voter's permanent registration record and to any other address at which the county auditor or secretary of state could reasonably expect mail to be received by the voter in order to confirm the voter's residence address. The confirmation notice must be designed to include a postage prepaid, preaddressed return form by which the registrant may verify the address information."

Recommendation: The elections department must change its procedures to ensure that a voter, who responds to a Confirmation Notice indicating he or she moved out of the county, but within the state, is put on inactive status. The department should have procedures in place for notifying the County Auditor of the county with the new address. As a courtesy, the elections department could consider sending a new registration form to the voter.

Updating the form and content of the Confirmation Notice will improve the department's voter registration procedures. The language, "Please cancel my voter registration as I have moved out of the county…" should be removed. The notice must be sent first-class forwardable mail with prepaid postage, and the poll site language should be revised as Garfield County votes entirely by mail.

Verification Notice

The Garfield County Auditor correctly sends verification notices to voters who have submitted incomplete voter registration applications. However, the verification notice sent by the elections department lacks several key components including the Voter Declaration. The notice provides a signature line, but lacks the necessary voter's oath to accompany it. The notice does not provide a method for indicating either missing I.D. or U.S. citizenship information, and is not currently designed to include prepaid postage.

When a voter does not return a verification notice within the allotted forty-five day period, the elections department sends a second verification notice.

RCW 29A.08.110(1) states, "An application is considered complete only if it contains the applicant's name, complete valid residence address, date of birth, signature attesting to the truth of the information provided, a mark in the check-off box confirming United States citizenship, and an indication that the provided driver's license number, state identification card number, or Social Security number has been confirmed by the secretary of state. If it is not complete, the auditor shall promptly mail a verification notice of the deficiency to the applicant. This verification notice shall require the applicant to provide the missing information. If the verification notice is not returned by the applicant within forty-five days or is returned as undeliverable, the name of the applicant shall not be placed on the official list of registered voters."

RCW 29A.08.230 indicates, "For all voter registrations, the registrant shall sign the following oath: 'I declare that the facts on this voter registration form are true. I am a citizen of the United States, I am not presently denied my civil rights as a result of being convicted of a felony, I will have lived in Washington at this address for thirty days immediately before the next election at which I vote, and I will be at least eighteen years old when I vote.' "

RCW 29A.08.030(1) requires, "The verification notice must be designed to include a postage prepaid, preaddressed return form by which the applicant may verify or send information."

Recommendation: The verification notice should be revised to include the same oath that appears on the voter registration application. In order for the form to be complete and for the voter to attest to the truth of the information provided, the voter must sign the Voter Declaration.

The notice must be designed to include prepaid postage. It should also be revised to include a space to notify the voter of the application's missing information for I.D. or U.S. citizenship.

If the verification notice is not returned by the voter within forty-five days, or is returned undeliverable, the registration is no longer valid.

Inactive Voters

When the Garfield County Auditor receives undeliverable mail from a voter, they correctly send a Confirmation Notice. They also send a Confirmation Notice to inactive voters approximately one month prior to an election. The department does not send inactive voters a ballot or an application to receive a ballot.

RCW 29A.48.010(3) states, "The auditor shall send each inactive voter either a ballot or an application to receive a ballot at least eighteen days before a primary, general election, or special election. If the inactive voter returns a voted ballot, the ballot shall be counted and the voter's status restored to active. If the inactive voter completes and returns an application, a ballot shall be sent and the voter's status restored to active."

Recommendation: The elections department must send each inactive voter a ballot or an application to receive a ballot before each election. The County Auditor's Office has been fulfilling the spirit of this law by sending each inactive voter a confirmation notice at the time of each election, but proper procedure would be to send a ballot or application instead. The application must give voters the opportunity to request a ballot for a specific election.

Processing Name Changes

The Garfield County Elections Department permits a voter to change his or her name by the approved methods in statute. However, it does not require both the new and former signatures in order to process the name change.

RCW 29A.08.440 requires, "…shall notify the auditor in one of the following ways: (1) By sending the auditor a notice clearly indentifying the name under which he or she is registered to vote, the voter's new name, and the voters registered residence. Such a notice must be signed by the voter using both the former name and the voter's new name; (2) by appearing in person before the auditor or registration assistant and signing such a change-of-name notice; (3) by signing such a change-of-name notice at the voter's precinct polling place on the day of a primary or special or general election; (4) by properly executing a name change on a mail-in registration application or a prescribed state agency application."

Recommendation: To verify that the registered voter requesting the name change is in fact the same person, the Garfield County Auditor must require both the voter's new and former signatures.

Incapacitated Person's Voter Registration

The Garfield County Auditor accepts notification from immediate family members to cancel an incapacitated person's voter registration.

RCW 29A.08.515 requires, "Upon receiving official notice that a court has imposed a guardianship for an incapacitated person and has determined that the person is incompetent for the purpose of rationally exercising the right to vote, under chapter 11.88 RCW, if the incapacitated person is a registered voter in the county, the county auditor shall cancel the incapacitated person's voter registration."

Recommendation: The elections department should only cancel a voter's registration upon receiving a copy of the official notice from the court that the person is incapacitated. This will ensure that the department has received proper documentation for cancelling the voter's registration and ensure they are in compliance with the law.

Public Notice of Availability of Services

Garfield County provides a multitude of services to voters at the County Auditor's Office, including assistance to disabled persons. However, a public notice of the availability of services was not published.

RCW 29A.04.220 states, "The county auditor shall provide public notice of the availability of registration and voting aids, assistance to elderly and disabled persons, and procedures for voting by absentee ballot calculated to reach elderly and disabled persons not later than public notice of the closing of registration for a primary or election."

Recommendation: Information regarding the availability of services to elderly and disabled persons must be included in the Notice of Closing or in a separate notice at least 30 days prior to the election.

Notice of Election

Garfield County published a timely Notice of Election for the Primary. The notice stated most, but not all, required information. The location where voters may obtain replacement ballots, requirements for postage, and voting center specifics were not included in the notice.

WAC 434-250-310(3) requires, "A county auditor conducting an election by mail, including a county auditor that conducts every election by mail, must state:

(c) The location where voters may obtain replacement ballots;
(d) Whether return postage is required;
(e) The dates, times and locations of designated deposit sites and voting centers…"

Recommendation: The Notice of Election must reflect that the Garfield County Auditor's Office is a voting center and include the necessary information above.

Voting Center Signage

The Garfield County Auditor's Office serves as a voting center. The office accepts voted mail ballots and has an accessible voting unit readily available to disabled voters. However, there was no visible signage outside the building indicating it was a location for voting. Voters entering the office weren't always certain whether they could drop off their voted ballots.

WAC 434-250-100 requires, "Each voting center must…(c) Be marked with signage outside the building indicating the location is a place for voting…"

Recommendation: The Garfield County Elections Department must display a sign outside the courthouse building to signify it as a place for voting. This will inform voters that they may drop off their voted mail ballots, or vote by using the accessible voting unit.

Sample Ballot

The Garfield County Auditor's Office did not make available a Sample Ballot for the Primary Election with all the pertinent issues, offices, and candidates in its jurisdiction.

RCW 29A.04.008(4) explains, " 'Sample ballot' means a printed facsimile of all the issues and offices on the ballot in a jurisdiction and is intended to give voters notice of the issues, offices, and candidates that are to be voted on at a particular primary, general election, or special election;"

WAC 434-230-010 requires, "Sample paper ballots shall be printed in substantially the same form as official ballots, but shall be a different color than the official ballot. Sample ballots shall be printed in a manner that makes them easily distinguishable from the official ballot. Sample ballots shall be available at least fifteen days prior to an election. Such sample ballots shall be made available through the office of the county auditor…"

Recommendation: The Garfield County Auditor's Office is a voting center and must make a Sample Ballot available to voters at least fifteen days prior to an election. To distinguish the Sample Ballot from the official ballot, it may be printed on colored paper or in a different color of ink.

Provisional Ballot Materials

The Garfield County Auditor's Office did not make provisional voting materials available to voters for the Primary. The department did not prepare provisional ballots, provisional envelopes, or a free access system for voters to determine a provisional ballot's disposition.

WAC 434-250-100(2) states, "If a location offers replacement ballots, provisional ballots, or voting on a direct recording electronic device, it is considered a voting center. The requirements for staffed ballot deposit sites apply to voting centers. Each voting center must:

> *(e) Offer provisional ballots, which may be sample ballots that meet provisional ballot requirements;*

RCW 29A.44.207 indicates, "Provisional ballots must be issued, along with a provisional ballot outer envelope and a security envelope, to voters as appropriate under RCW 29A.04.008. The provisional ballot outer envelope must include a place for the voter's name; registered address, both present and former if applicable; date of birth; reason for the provisional ballot; the precinct number and the precinct polling location at which the voter has voted; and a space for the county auditor to list the disposition of the provisional ballot. The provisional ballot outer envelope must also contain a declaration as required for absentee ballot outer envelopes under RCW 29A.40.091; a place for the voter to sign the oath; and a summary of the applicable penalty provisions of this chapter..."

WAC 434-253-048(1) states, "Each county shall establish a free access system, as required by the Help America Vote Act…"

(2) The free access system must employ measures to ensure that access is free of cost to the voter and restricted to the individual who cast the ballot, and that the voter's personal information is secure and confidential.

RCW 29A44.207 also states, "The official shall then give the voter written information advising the voter how to ascertain whether the vote was counted and, if applicable, the reason why the vote was not counted."

Recommendation: The Garfield County Auditor's Office is a voting center and must provide provisional voting materials which contain all of the required information. The department must also provide a free access system for a voter to find out if his/her ballot was counted. One method is to send a letter to each provisional voter with information on the disposition of the ballot.

Off-site Ballot Deposit Location

The County Auditor's Office is located within the Garfield County Courthouse and serves as a ballot deposit site location. Voters may drop off voted ballots at the courthouse during regular office hours and from 7 AM – 8 PM on Election Day. However, the County Auditor does not provide a second secured location for voters to drop off ballots.

WAC 434-250-320 requires, "A county auditor conducting a county-wide election entirely by mail must provide at least two locations to deposit ballots. These locations may be either a ballot deposit site or a voting center, as defined in WAC 434-250-100. At least one location may be at the county auditor's office. All other deposit sites must be at geographical locations that are different from the county auditor's office.

WAC 434-250-100(1) explains, "If a location only receives ballots and does not issue any ballots, it is considered a ballot deposit site. Ballot deposit sites may be staffed or unstaffed."

Recommendation: The Garfield County Auditor must provide an off-site deposit location for voters to drop off voted ballots.

Perhaps the simplest solution for Garfield County is to provide a secured, unstaffed deposit site on Election Day at an indoor location geographically separate from the County Auditor's Office (e.g. Senior Center; Library). The site doesn't need to be staffed all day, but it needs to be secured at the location, open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day, and locked promptly at 8 p.m. Ballots may be retrieved the next day. Once the site's location is determined, it must be listed in the Notice of Election.

Resolution and Duplication Logs

The Garfield County Elections Department does an excellent job of utilizing its digital scan system to resolve questions of voter intent, write-ins, overvotes, and undervotes on voted ballots. The department's voting system keeps an electronic audit log of all actions taken in the process; however, the department does not print and sign a copy of the log.

The Garfield County Canvassing Board duplicates unreadable ballots at an open public meeting and documents the process in its board meeting minutes. The random serial numbers on the ballots are recorded in the meeting minutes.

WAC 434-261-102 states, "In counties tabulating ballots on a digital scan vote tallying system, two staff designated by the auditor's office must resolve ballots identified as requiring resolution. A log of the resolutions must be printed and signed by the two staff."

RCW 29A.60.125(1) requires, "Each original ballot and duplicate ballot must be assigned the same unique control number, with the number being marked upon the face of each ballot, to ensure that each duplicate ballot may be tied back to the original ballot;

(2) A log must be kept of the ballots duplicated, which must at least include:

(a) The control number of each original ballot and the corresponding duplicate ballot;

(b) The initials of at least two people who participated in the duplication of each ballot; and

(c) The total number of ballots duplicated."

Recommendation: The elections department must print out and sign a resolution log to document the resolving process. The log must be printed and then signed by the two staff members conducting the process.

The Garfield County Canvassing Board must create a duplication log. The board must assign each original ballot and duplicate ballot the same unique control number, with the number being marked upon the face of each ballot. The matching numbers must be recorded in a log to tie them together. These steps can be achieved in conjunction with Garfield County's current duplication process.

Canvassing Board Manual

The Garfield County Canvassing Board does not have a procedures manual that contains the administrative rules for canvassing an election.

RCW 29A.60.140(4) requires, "The county canvassing board shall adopt administrative rules to facilitate and govern the canvassing process in that jurisdiction."

RCW 29A.60.140(5) further requires, "All rules adopted by the county canvassing board must be adopted in a public meeting under chapter 42.30 RCW."

Recommendation: Creating and adopting an updated Canvassing Board Manual must be a high priority for the Board and the County Auditor's Office. It is critical to the consistent, compliant conduct of canvassing procedures in Garfield County.

Once the manual is written, it must be officially adopted by the Canvassing Board at an open public meeting. The date of adoption should be included in the manual.

Disability Advisory Committee

The Garfield County Auditor provides accessible voting for disabled voters. An accessible voting unit is located at the County Auditor's Office and is accessible by an elevator. However,

Garfield County has not established a Disability Advisory Committee to fully examine the accessibility of its elections for voters with disabilities.

RCW 29A.46.260(2) requires, "Each county shall establish and maintain an advisory committee that includes persons with diverse disabilities and persons with expertise in providing accommodations for persons with disabilities. The committee shall assist election officials in developing a plan to identify and implement changes to improve the accessibility of elections for voters with disabilities…"

"(3) Counties may form a joint advisory committee to develop the plan identified in subsection (2) of this section if the total population of the joining counties does not exceed thirty thousand, and the counties are geographically adjacent."

Recommendation: The elections department must form a Disability Advisory Committee. Taking Garfield County's population into consideration, it could partner with joint counties to form a committee. The committee should include persons with disabilities and experts at accommodations for persons who are disabled. The committee must then develop a plan to improve the accessibility of Garfield County's elections.

Certification of Election Administrators

The Garfield County Chief Deputy is a Certified Election Administrator under the Washington State Election Administration and Certification Program. The Garfield County Auditor's staff has many collective years of service in elections, but it does not currently employ two Washington State Certified Election Administrators.

RCW 36.22.220 requires, "… not less than two persons of the auditor's office who conduct primaries and elections in the county shall be certified under chapter (29A.04) RCW as elections administrators."

Recommendation: A second staff member of the Garfield County Auditor's Office must be certified. Current staff members possess the experience in elections to become certified. In addition to elections-related experience, staff wishing to become certified must attend a two-day orientation class, accrue 40 hours of additional education, and pass a written exam.

A second staff member could become initially certified at the Assistant Election Administrator level; however, the Assistant level does not meet the requirements of RCW 36.20.220.

Suggestions

The following are suggestions for increasing efficiency and improving operations within the County Auditor's Office. Although these suggestions do not address issues involving compliance with state laws or administrative rules, the reviewer identified the tasks as areas of election administration in which the County Auditor might improve the efficiency and operation of the office.

Written Procedures

The Garfield County Auditor provided the reviewer with many documents and verbal explanations which greatly assisted the review process. However, the department does not maintain a current written procedures manual describing all aspects of its election administration.

Suggestion: The County Auditor's Office should make creating a comprehensive, step-by-step procedures manual a high priority. The procedures should be written in a format which allows the manual to be utilized by any person new to performing the task. The manual should be tailored to fit the county's needs. For Garfield County, such a manual could be particularly helpful in the event a new staff person had to step in and help with Voter Registration, Logic and Accuracy Testing, or Digital Resolution.

A procedures manual is not only helpful to new staff, but many tasks required in election administration are performed infrequently. The manual will assist in both of these areas. Additionally, the manual will provide consistency between elections and document Garfield County's compliance with election laws.

One of the most difficult tasks is keeping the procedures manual up to date with changes in law or rule and changes in actual practice. The reviewer suggests an annual review of all procedures to ensure they are kept current.

County's Response to Draft Review Report

The Election Certification and Training Program issued a Draft Review Report to the Garfield County Canvassing Board in January 2009. In accordance with WAC 434-260-145, we provided Garfield County 10 days to respond, in writing, to recommendations listed in the draft report.

The Garfield County Canvassing Board provided the following response to the Draft Review Report. The signed original of their response is on file in the Office of the Secretary of State.

Garfield County

Auditor

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January 16, 2009

Miriam Campbell, Elections Program Specialist
Office of the Secretary of State
Election Certification and Training Program
PO Box 40229
Olympia, WA 98504-0229

Dear Ms. Campbell

We have received a copy of the Draft Review Report of the Election Procedures Review of Garfield County for the 2008 Primary Election. This report was reviewed by the Auditor's office and the Garfield County Canvassing Board.

Attached please find the county's response to the recommendations in the report. These items have been reviewed by the Canvassing Board and prepared by the Garfield County Auditor.

If you have any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

Donna J. Deal

Donna J. Deal

County's Response to Draft Review Report

Item #

1. Questionnaire to Cities, Towns and Districts.

The county is creating a questionnaire to send to all local jurisdictions asking them to confirm salaries, incumbents, and offices up for election during the current election cycle. This questionnaire will be sent out before March 1st of each year.

2. Voters Requiring Verification of Identity

A notice has been created to send to voters who need to provide identification. We will continue to extend the courtesy of a phone call, along with the notice, as needed near election deadlines.

3. Confirmation Notice

The county will update the form and content of our Confirmation Notice to comply with current laws. The voter responding to a confirmation notice indicating that they have moved out of the county, but within the state, will be put on inactive status.

4. Verification Notice

The county will update the form and contend of our Verification Notice to comply with current laws. If the verification notice is not returned by the voter within forty-five days, or is returned undeliverable, the registration will be no longer valid.

5. Inactive Voters

The county will send each inactive voter an application to receive a ballot before each election.

6. Processing Name Changes

The county will require registered voters to sign their new and former name before we process a name change.

7. Incapacitated Person's Voter Registration

The county will only cancel the voter registrations of incapacitated persons upon receiving official notice from the court.

8. Public Notice of Availability of Services

The county has created a Notice of Closing that includes information on the availability of services, including assistance to disabled persons and the elderly. This notice is published al least 30 days prior to the election.

9. Notice of Election

The Notice of Election has been modified to include all the required information. This was done before the General Election 2008.

10. Voting Center Signage
The county now displays a sign on the bulletin board in front of the Courthouse and another at the office door to indicate that the Auditor's office is a place for voting during the election cycle. This was started during the General Election 2008.

11. Sample Ballot
The county will create a sample ballot for each election with all issues, offices, and candidates in its jurisdiction for each election. A sample was created for the General Election 2008 and a new sample ballot will continue to be created for each election.

12. Provisional Ballot Materials
The county will have provisional ballot materials available for each election. All provisional voters will be sent a letter with information on the disposition of their ballot. The materials were available for the General Election 2008.

13. Off-site Ballot Deposit Location
The county is having difficulty locating an off-site ballot deposit location because of the logistics of Garfield County. Pomeroy is the county seat and the only incorporated city in the county. There are no other population centers within the county limits. The City of Pomeroy is only approximately one-mile long and ½ mile wide and if someone is going to drop off a ballot they are much more likely to just bring it to the courthouse, rather than a drop-off site that is at a maximum of 5 blocks from the courthouse. We will be contacting our local Library, Senior Center and Museum to see if any of them would be willing to stay open for 13 hours on Election Day and be designated as our off-site ballot deposit site location.

14. Resolution and Duplication Logs
The county elections department is printing out and signing a resolution log after the resolving process each day ballots are resolved. The canvassing board has created a duplication log that was used during the General Election 2008 and such a duplication log will be used at each time the canvassing board meets to resolve ballots.

15. Canvassing Board Manual
Garfield County is in the process of creating a canvassing board manual. After creation it will be adopted by the board during an open public meeting.

16. Disability Advisory Committee
The county created a joint Disability Advisory Committee with Asotin and Columbia Counties. They met for the first time on November 19, 2008 and eleven people were present. The group worked on issues of concern to all counties and listed drop-box projects and grant applications as their number one priority. They will be meeting again in the near future to review progress and implement other projects.

17. Certification of Election Administrators
The county currently has one Certified Election Administrator and the county auditor has completed the orientation class and has passed the written examination. The auditor will work at completing the certification process so that two staff members will be Certified Election Administrators.

Conclusion

The Garfield County Elections Department conducts accurate and transparent elections with the resources available to it. The Garfield County Auditor maintains excellent ballot accountability and strives for mastery of the county's digital voting system. The department provides skillful ballot processing, good voter services and community outreach efforts.

The department responded quickly to suggestions posed by the reviewer and made key modifications in time for the subsequent General Election. Those improvements involve changes to the Notice of Election, Public Notice of Availability, voting signage, provisional balloting materials, sample ballots, and duplication and resolution logs.

Currently, the County Auditor and her Chief Deputy handle most of the duties in the elections department. They must divide their time between Elections, Licensing, Recordings, and Financial Services functions of the County Auditor's Office. The multitude of office responsibilities has prevented them from devoting time to essential election processes, such as writing comprehensive procedures for their office and developing a County Canvassing Board Manual. Because of limited staffing, it is also difficult to send staff to training in order to accrue the hours necessary for certification.

Garfield County must make a plan for updating and reviewing the county's voter registration procedures, applications, and notices. The time devoted to updating its printed materials will go a long way towards compliance in future elections. To give the staff time for creating these materials, the elections department may need to hire temporary staff to cover some day-to-day duties until the materials are completed.

Garfield's voter services will also be enhanced by partnering with neighboring counties to create a Disability Advisory Board. The board's potential proposals for an off-site deposit location could prove helpful to the county.

It is evident that the Garfield County Auditor and her staff are committed to conducting elections with precision and transparency. Refining its voter registration procedures will add to the department's efficiency. Addressing the recommendations and suggestions within this report will assist them in accomplishing this goal.

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Signature