

2020 Presidential General Election, Operations Summary Report
Board of Elections, Montgomery County, MD
February 22, 2021

Candidate Filing: This is an activity that begins about a year and half before each election cycle which provides prospective candidates the opportunity to explore their possibilities as a candidate and/or file a "Certificate of Candidacy" for the current election. During this Presidential cycle Montgomery County Board of Elections staff fielded numerous questions from the public through telephone conversations, emails and direct contact--speaking with walk-in visitors. The public interest in the 2020 Election doubled compared to other like election years. There were no Write-In candidates for the Montgomery County Board of Education, but staff was still responsible for creating a full, State-wide Write-In list to be posted in each county polling location. It should be noted that currently the Board of Education contests are not included in the Public Funding Program.

Ballot Proofing: After the candidate filing deadline passes and leading into the printing of the ballot, a thorough proofing of the ballot commences. A proofing process involving several proofing teams following State ballot guidelines confirmed the accuracy of 255 Montgomery County ballot styles, both English and Spanish versions. Proofing included reviewing candidate names and ensured that the audio ballot had correct pronunciations of candidate names and all issues or ballot questions were presented per State election laws. With the concept of precinct-based ballots, ballot development during the General Election became more complicated. The number of ballot styles increased from approximately 35 ballot styles to 255 and staff man hours increased to manage the intricate details of a precinct-based ballot. After a complicated proofing, the State certified the ballot and copy was handed off for the creation and printing of the Sample Ballot as well as ordering the paper ballot. Because of the pandemic, mail-In ballots were used in record numbers. Voters found mail-in ballots a safer alternative.

Election Judge Recruitment: The team is responsible for recruiting through outreach activities and other advertising media and assigning and monitoring the performance of registered Maryland citizens who volunteer as election judges (pollworkers). The team functions with one program lead as Recruitment Coordinator and two permanent recruiters. During the height of the election cycle, temporary staff comprises the rest of the team (four additional recruiters and three support members). Each recruiter is assigned a group of polling locations with the mission of supplying an adequate complement of election judges. Even with pandemic conditions, the team fielded an adequate number of election judges to staff all centers. After the election, the team is tasked with creating payroll for all participants and submitting it to Finance for check preparation; and collection of data from peer-to-peer reports and election judge performance reports are utilized to review election judge service during this and all other elections.

Supply Warehouse: Warehouse staff is tasked with supplying all polling locations with supplies and equipment to run the election. The major focus for the warehouse staff during the General Election was managing the unprecedented number of ballots needed to accommodate 11 Early Voting and 40 Election Day vote centers. The Director and Program Manager met the challenge of calculating and preparing for voter preference during the pandemic and the introduction of the Vote-by-Mail system. This order was the largest number of ballots processed and packed by this Agency. After ballots were secured for delivery, the Supply staff prepared the supplies and supply verification was conducted. Because of the pandemic and observing social distancing, Election Judge Chiefs did not pick up the supply bags as is customary. The bags were packed inside the delivery carts and were delivered by the moving contractor during equipment deliveries. It should be noted during Early Voting, temporary warehouse staff acted as daily runners as a precautionary measure to ensure that centers were equipped with equipment and supplies to maintain a smooth voting process.

Ballot Drop Boxes: Using ballot drop boxes was a new addition to the voting system. In past elections, voters were given the convenience of dropping election mail in the drop box located outside the Board of Elections office. In the 2020 Primary Election, ballot drop boxes were introduced; and in the General Election, Operations staff served 52 off-site boxes daily. The boxes are State owned and delivered to the sites designated by the local Boards staff. They were installed in three phases and were monitored by surveillance cameras at each location. A temporary staff of 20 individuals were hired and routes were also augmented with permanent staff taking part in ballot collection. This staff worked in teams of two and had assigned routes. The boxes were visited and emptied regularly. A State mandated Integrity Transfer form was used to track all ballots collected and delivered to the Board office where the ballots were prepared for counting.

Polling Places: Operations has the duty of assigning and managing polling sites for each election. In the 2020 Elections, locations had been identified, approved, and reserved and leased. After selections were approved, Board staff took the precinct information to identify equipment allocations, supplies, election judge assignments, etc. However, following the Governor's mandate, it was necessary to redo the entire process to accommodate a hybrid version of a Vote-by-Mail election system. The circumstances of the pandemic generated uncertainties which caused numerous modifications before a final plan was accepted. After numerous changes directed by the State, new locations, 11 Early Voting and 40 Election Day vote centers, were chosen to serve Montgomery County voters during the General Election. Given the stress of the pandemic on the community, comments from the voters proved positive. Vote centers were received with overall satisfaction.

Equipment Delivery: Operations also arranges and manages the equipment delivery and retrieval. The volume of ballots delivered in 2020 was larger than anticipated. Many more cabinets were delivered than originally planned; however, staff managed to accurately pack all the necessary materials to accommodate the centers. Able Moving did an exemplary job of delivering and maintaining the security of the voting system. With the huge challenge faced in the past year, Board staff members remained dedicated to ensuring a democratic election.

Respectfully submitted by Christine Rzeszut and Operations Staff Members, Ryan White, Mary Beth Habel,
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