MANAGING CHANGE IN AN ELECTION OFFICE

October 2007

Quick Start

MANAGEMENT GUIDE

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The Quick Start Management Guide for Managing Change in an Election Office is part of a series of brochures designed to highlight and summarize the information contained in the chapters of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Election Management Guidelines (EMG). The goal of the EMG is to provide a collection of election management guidelines, consolidated into one document, to assist State and local election officials effectively manage and administer elections. These guidelines are solely designed to serve as a source of information for election officials and not as requirements by which they must abide. The EAC expects the EMG to be completed in 2008. However, due to the urgent need for election management resources, EMG chapters and Quick Starts are released as they are completed.

The content of the EMG and the Quick Start Management Guides has been developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation and ensuring the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

Introduction

- Election and voter registration administration practices and procedures are subject to change based on a variety of factors, expected and unexpected. Examples of these factors include, but are not limited to, changes in Federal, State, or local election requirements, new technology, increased or decreased budget, staffing changes, relocation or reorganization of election offices, and Election Day emergencies.

- Changes can come from external sources *(i.e. changes in Federal laws)* or from internal sources *(i.e. changes in staff)*, and may not always be expected. Anticipating change and developing a management plan in advance can help alleviate its impact on the election offices' functions and processes.

- As noted above, change can also be unexpected. These kinds of situations may be initially remedied by the office's contingency and disaster plans, but long term solutions may be better addressed by change management plans developed in response to those situations. A separate guide and an EMG chapter have been developed to address Contingency and Disaster Planning; these are available on the EAC Web site at www.eac.gov.

EVALUATING THE NEED FOR CHANGE

- Developing a successful change management plan begins with an assessment of the election office's current functions and capabilities. A thorough evaluation will provide a closer look at the office's existing policies and procedures and how these may be affected by internal and external sources.

- Evaluations of existing policies and procedures should be conducted on a regular basis to identify the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (S.W.O.T. analysis).

- Conduct regularly scheduled team meetings to review existing policies and procedures. Develop an office environment that encourages perpetual redesign and improvement. Empower all staff members to review tasks and procedures and recommend change.

- Invite temporary staff and poll workers to regularly scheduled debriefing sessions. Use these meetings to challenge them to critique existing policies and procedures, to recommend change, to communicate that everyone is a member of the same team, and that any suggestion or new idea is welcome.
  TIP: *Use these meetings to reinforce that the business of managing elections involves managing perpetual change – in Federal and State election laws and in internal improvements to provide better service to our customers – the voters.*

- Schedule monthly meetings with your county information technology staff and your election office technology staff. Utilize these meetings as a forum to discuss new software/hardware solutions and/or new version releases. Distribute an election calendar to the team members to educate all technology team members that any change in software/hardware must be implemented when the office is not in "election mode". Request that the team develop an implementation/change calendar for final approval. TIP: *The local election administrator should attend these meetings and use every opportunity to build an understanding of election administration.*

- Review job tasks and work flow to determine how technology can enhance and streamline existing work processes. Spend time developing a clear understanding of the job tasks performed by each staff member. Make note of any duplication of work effort as you analyze how each task is managed and completed. TIP: *Develop work flow diagrams to provide a visual aid for use in determining how a change in processing can eliminate duplication and improve overall efficiency.*

Developing a Change Management Plan

- Create a timeline for implementing major change. "Major" change in an election office is defined as a change in software, voting systems, poll worker training, new election laws, i.e. early voting or vote by mail, etc. Build the "change timeline" around your existing election calendar and timeline.

- Determine how the change will impact your internal operations. Which work area will be most challenged by the change? Which staff members will be tasked with managing the change? Remember that the staff will look to you for motivation and leadership. Your ability to embrace the change will foster the same attitude throughout the organization.

- Depending upon the type of change, you may want to consider establishing focus groups, involving staff, poll workers, temporary staff, etc. Remember that any stakeholder should be included in your change management plan.

- **Communicate, communicate, and communicate!** Any major change involves developing a community outreach component in the change management plan. This can include any of the following:

  - Issuing periodic press releases informing the media about key milestones.

  - Attending area meetings and events to inform and educate the public regarding the impending change. *Examples include: Chamber of commerce, Kiwanis, Optimist, Rotary, etc.*

  - Developing newsletters/brochures to educate the public about the change.

  - Conducting hands-on demonstrations to engage the public in the change. *Example: Develop a cadre of poll workers to deploy throughout the community as ambassadors for the change.*

Budgeting for Change

- Recognize that change often has a price tag beyond the initial cost. Develop a detailed long range cost analysis. Schedule a meeting with your internal budget staff person and your county/State budget staff representative. Begin the meeting by requesting their assistance in communicating the overall impact of the change, including initial costs, ongoing costs, and any facility or staffing costs. *Example: A change to all mail ballot voting has an immediate impact relating to space needs and a long range impact on people, paper, and postage. The number of people to manage the paper; the cost of paper – for ballots, envelopes; and the increase in the cost of postage.*

- Remember that elections can be perceived as a "one day a year" work environment. Use your budget proposal and presentation as an opportunity to educate the elected officials and the community about election administration. Tip: *Use visual aids to demonstrate the organizational chart for your regular office staff; and then display the organizational chart for Election Day, which should include all polling places and all poll workers in each polling place. On Election Day, the Election Office often employs more staff than the entire county organization.*

Redesigning Work Flow and Job Skill Sets

- Change often brings with it a need to evaluate internal work flow. This is especially true with new technology. For example, introducing image scanning to your office will enable you to redesign how voter registration cards are processed. Encourage staff to embrace this opportunity to find a better way of doing their work – be sure to emphasize any "dreaded" tasks that will be eliminated by the change.

- Often a redesign in work flow brings with it the need for rearranging the affected work area. Be sure to build into the change management plan an evaluation of space needs. This can be something as simple as moving office cubicles, or purchasing a new work station, or as complicated as moving to a larger facility.

- Take the opportunity that change brings to evaluate existing personnel position descriptions. Often change empowers staff members to broaden their skill sets and accept more job responsibilities. Encourage your staff to develop additional skills, and reward them by re-evaluating position descriptions, and moving them to higher job grades.

IMPLEMENTING AND MANAGING CHANGE

- Involve all full time staff members in the decision to implement change. Recognize that change impacts each employee in a different way. Some people embrace change; others resist even the slightest change. Remember that "people issues" must be managed along with the change. TIP: *Take time to meet individually with staff members, on an "as needed" basis. During the change, be sure that you maintain an "open door" policy for any time that any one needs to talk about the change.*

- Communicate any change in state and federal election laws immediately to all staff. Consider establishing an "in the loop" email broadcast system so that all staff receives an update on the change at the same time. Remember, that email does not substitute for talking one on one about the change. Make a habit of holding impromptu meetings to quickly update staff on events – either at the county, state or federal level.

- Take responsibility for the change. Reassure your staff and poll workers that you are committed to their success. Provide sufficient training to support the change. Allow staff ample time to adapt to the change, to learn the new process, and to develop their support tools, i.e. internal help desk, etc.

- Provide an adequate support system to ensure success. Frustration levels peak when answers to problems are not available. This frustration quickly compounds under the intense pressure and stress on Election Day. Be sure that you have provided adequate, trained staff to answer the phones; that you have provided hands-on training for poll workers; and that each polling place has additional support from technology-savvy rovers/technicians.

- Be aware that it is rare that a change management plan goes 100% according to schedule! Prepare for the unexpected by taking time to develop a "What If?" set of scenarios. This can include everything from, "what if the key staff person resigns?" to "what if the hardware server fails?" to a media frenzy resulting from the change.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF CHANGE

- Stay engaged throughout the change process. Take time to involve yourself in the change. Become a part of the team by actually doing the work yourself. *Example: If the staff expresses frustration with the transaction speed when inputting voter registration records, put yourself in their chair and do some of their data entry work. They will appreciate your willingness to involve yourself in acknowledging the problem and finding the solution.*

The EAC is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). It is charged with administering payments to states and developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, implementing election administration improvements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, accrediting voting system test laboratories and certifying voting equipment and serving as a national clearinghouse and resource of information regarding election administration.