



Chesterfield County, Virginia Internal Audit

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DATE: January 18, 2018

TO: Joseph P. Casey, Ph.D., County Administrator

FROM: Greg L. Akers, Director 

SUBJECT: General Registrar's Office Internal Control Self-Assessment Special Project

Internal Audit assisted the General Registrar in performing an internal control self-assessment for election processes and reporting.

Background

The Chesterfield Electoral Board appointed the current General Registrar on April 1, 2017. The office serves Chesterfield County's 76 precincts with 9 full-time employees and over 1,200 temporary employees during elections. This includes handling candidate matters, voter concerns, carrying out the Chesterfield Electoral Board and the State Department of Elections directives, and following Code of Virginia requirements. These responsibilities require considerable organization and coordination for personnel and equipment.

The General Registrar's Office conducts and certifies elections by managing election equipment, polling places, absentee voting, recruitment and training of election officers, ballot preparation, and public information. Additionally, the office offers a comprehensive, year-round voter registration program, determining voter eligibility, maintaining registration records, processing absentee ballot applications, and certifying candidate-nominating petitions. Voters can update registration information online or in person at the General Registrar's Office.

The General Registrar's Office uses laptops as electronic poll books (EPBs) for voter check-in by precinct during elections. Unique ballots are created by precinct and voting machines (DS200s) are configured to scan completed ballots to record election counts. Voter data is downloaded from Virginia Election and Registration System (VERIS). The General Registrar uses data download and Datacard Advocate precinct management system to create poll book deployment files that are uploaded to EPBs for election day. Poll workers use EPBs to identify registered voters that are provided ballots. If voters are not listed on the EPB, provisional ballots are provided and logged at each precinct. Provisional ballots, where voter registration is subsequently confirmed, are separately processed.

Each precinct has a chief election officer responsible for supervising poll staff, preparing reconciliations between EPB and DS200 counts, and providing EPB and DS200 system closure authorization. After DS200 closure, the office uses a County Information System Technology (IST) developed database application, Chesterfield Election Reporting (CHER), to extract result data. CHER provides enhanced reporting capabilities compared to the included DS200 application. Each precinct calls in results once extraction is complete. The Registrar's Office certifies and uploads vote totals to State Department of Elections website.

Analysis

Our analysis primarily consisted of developing an internal control questionnaire (ICQ) to help the General Registrar identify potential risk areas and evaluate controls. During this evaluation, we noted potential improvement opportunities for management consideration:

- Chief election officers have unique passwords to close EPBs by precinct. In the event of a premature EPB closure, registration verification cannot occur without EPBs and provisional ballots would be used until polls close. General Registrar should document alternative procedures if EPBs have been closed prematurely during an election day.
- County IST created a custom extraction application (CHER) to obtain precinct election results from DS200 optical scanners. Documentation for this application is limited and does not include application source code. General Registrar's Office should strengthen CHER supporting documentation to maintain application functionality.
- During November 2017 election, a preliminary countywide 285-vote lead for a candidate on November 7, 2017, later changed to 694-vote lead for the opposition on November 13, 2017. The preliminary results omitted votes for one DS200 voting machine. Chesterfield specific procedures are not documented for voter registration, election processes, EPB to DS200 count reconciliations, and canvass variance identification between preliminary and final results. During our discussion, the General Registrar stated future intention to create the specific procedures. General Registrar should document procedures for all office processes.
- We understand that the General Registrar performs and certifies updates for all 200+ EPBs (Datacard Advocate Software). Office laptops used for EPBs are nearing end of lifespan. The 85 DS200 voting machines also have unique vendor software. The General Registrar's Office does not have a maintenance or support contract for EPBs and DS200 voting machines. General Registrar should:
 - Evaluate future technology support options to best prepare the office for timely application and hardware issue resolution.
 - Coordinate with County IST to assess EPB and DS200 replacement and support needs that satisfy state requirements. Additionally, the Registrar should communicate funding estimates for future capital budget planning.
- CHER database application is only accessible in county and school buildings, or through a virtual private network (VPN). 20 of 75 precincts, not in a county or school building, currently require additional manual procedures to report election results. General Registrar should evaluate if VPN access for devices at the 20 precincts could improve election reporting efficiency.

We believe our analysis provides an objective summary of internal controls provided to Internal Audit for evaluation. However, as required by Government Auditing Standards (2011 Revision) section 2.12 issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, we must communicate this evaluation does not constitute an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS).

Please contact me if you have questions.

Copy via email:

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Chesterfield Electoral Board