



ELECTION AFTER-ACTION REPORT

MAY 11TH, 2021

Executive Office –
County of Riverside



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
INTERVIEWS.....	3
STATE IMPACT.....	4
CHALLENGES.....	5-10
IMPROVEMENT MATRIX.....	11-12
SUMMARY.....	11

INTRODUCTION

On December 8, 2020, the Executive Office of the County of Riverside was directed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors to conduct an After-Action Review of the 2020 General Election process and return with a report and recommendations. Analyses of the General Election activities were conducted to identify opportunities for process improvements and efficiencies. Detailed information regarding our recommendations are included in the body of this report.

The November 2020 General Election resulted in a record number of voters and vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots that were distributed. A total of 1,243,154 VBM ballots were mailed and 1,016,896 ballots were cast resulting in an 81.8% voter turnout. The Riverside County Registrar of Voters (ROV) was required by the State to implement a new voting system and voting method for a presidential election during the middle of a pandemic with less than 3 months to plan and prepare.

INTERVIEWS

The after-action review team conducted several interviews with various individuals. Our intent was to understand everyone’s perspective of the election and identify any areas of improvement for future elections. The individuals that participated in the interview process were:

Kevin Jeffries - 1 st District	Sheriff’s Department
Karen Spiegel - 2 nd District- Chair	Riverside County Information Technology
Chuck Washington - 3 rd District	Temporary Assistance Personnel
V. Manuel Perez - 4 th District	Consolidated Printing Company - County Vendor
Jeff Hewitt- 5 th District	Representative of the Democratic County Party
Registrar of Voters - County of Riverside	Representative of the Republican County Party
District Attorney	

STATE IMPACT

The Riverside County ROV conducted the 2020 General Election at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the pandemic, the State of California signed several Executive Orders and pieces of Legislation that directly impacted the way the election would be conducted. Many of the Executive Orders created a new requirement that was not budgeted for in the current fiscal year. The Department had to purchase 390 laptops, 260 desktop printers, 150 cellular routers, and 150 ballot marking devices. All the equipment had to be procured, installed, and tested in less than 3 months. On the next page there is a summary table of all Legislation and Executive Orders that directly impacted the way that Riverside County conducted the November 2020 General Election and the March 2021 Special Election.

STATE IMPACT

LEGISLATION	DATE	SUMMARY	DEPARTMENT RESPONSE
Executive Order N-67-20 and AB860	6/6/2020	Required counties to provide three days of early voting starting the Saturday before election day and required ballot drop-box locations be available between October 6 and November 3.	Established 130 Voter Assistance Centers that were open from 10/31 - 11/2 from 9:00am to 5:00pm and on Election Day, 11/3, from 7:00am to 8:00pm.
Executive Order N-67-20 and AB860	6/6/2020	Allowed counties to consolidate voting locations, with at least one voting location per 10,000 registered voters.	80 ballot drop-off locations were established and open Monday - Friday, from 10/5 - Election Day. A total of 497,408 vote-by-mail ballots were dropped off at ballot drop-off locations for the November 2020 General Election. In the 2020 primary election only 5,000 Vote-by-Mail ballots were dropped off.
Executive Order N-67-20 and AB860	6/6/2020	Mandated that county election officials use the Secretary of State's ballot tracking system.	The ballot tracking system was not providing real time information which caused confusion to registered voters.
Executive Order N-67-20 and AB860	6/6/2020	Codified the Governor's Executive Order mandating all registered, active voters be mailed a ballot for the November election.	In Riverside County 1,243,154 vote-by-mail ballots were mailed between 10/5/2020 and 10/27/2020. For comparison, in March 2020, 899,904 vote-by-mail ballots were mailed, in November 2018, 771,461 vote-by-mail ballots were mailed, and in November 2016, 724,283 vote-by-mail ballots were mailed.
AB 3370	9/18/2020	County elections officials may begin processing vote by mail (VBM) ballots on the 15th business day before the election, instead of the 10th business day before the election, provided that a vote count is not accessed or released until 8 p.m. on the day of the election.	The Riverside County Registrar of Voters started the ballot opening and counting process on 10/21/2020, which was 13 days prior to Election Day. The first results released after 8:00pm on Election Night contained 386,333 ballots which was 38% of all ballots cast.
SB 29	2/19/2021	This bill extended the requirements to mail a ballot to every registered voter for all elections prior to January 1, 2022.	This bill was signed into law on February 19, 2021. This was 11 days prior to the March special election. ROV sent the mailing file of 11,502 records to the printing vendor; however, the vendor delivered the ballots to the USPS one day prior to the election. This led to many voters receiving their ballots after the day of the election.

CHALLENGES

The Riverside County ROV encountered challenges that were attributed to COVID-19, state legislation, and vendor mishaps. We identified eight challenges during the 2020 general election that we would like to bring to your attention. The challenges identified serve as an opportunity to improve our processes for a smoother election process. The following section provides a department response, along with a recommendation to solve the challenge.

CHALLENGE #1 - BALLOTS ARRIVED BEFORE INFORMATION GUIDES

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE	Riverside County Voter Information Guides were mailed to all registered voters between 9/24 and 10/8. ROV made daily ballot deliveries to the USPS from 10/5 to 10/9 until all 1.2 million ballots were in the mail. For the November 3, 2020 General Election vote-by-mail ballots were not released for mailing until confirmation was received from the County Voter Information Guide printing vendor that the books had been mailed. Postage receipts were provided showing that the guides had been received by the USPS prior to the ballots. USPS confirmed that guides had been received for delivery prior to the ballots but did not provide any further explanation for the delay.
RECOMMENDATION	The recommendation moving forward is to mail the Information guides at least 7 days prior to mailing the ballots to ensure that guides are received prior to ballots.

CHALLENGE #2 - SYSTEM ERRORS

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE	On the first day that the Voter Assistance Centers opened there were technical difficulties with the voter check in and look up function. It was experiencing system errors which ended up causing long lines in the morning. The issue was identified by the vendor at 1:00pm on 10/31 and by 2:00pm all systems were functioning normally. No other system issues were reported at the Voter Assistance Centers.
RECOMMENDATION	The first recommendation is for each Voter Assistance Center to be supplied with at least 5 laptops for voter check in and at least 10 touchscreen ballot marking devices for any future elections conducted with Voter Assistance Centers. ROV does not currently have the inventory for this recommendation so additional purchases would need to be made. The second recommendation is to increase the coordination and collaboration between ROV and other county departments to avoid future system errors.

CHALLENGE #3 - CERTIFICATION & UPDATING BALLOT COUNTS

<p>DEPARTMENT RESPONSE</p>	<p>For the November 2020 Election ROV operated 7 days a week from 8am to 3am. The night shift worked from 6pm to 3am, seven days a week. Recruitment of TAP employees for the night shift is challenging. Most of the time ROV cannot recruit people to fill the night shift positions. The people that do accept the position usually have a day job and about 1 week into the assignment they quit because they cannot handle the double shift.</p> <p>On election night, ROV is always hit with a bottle neck due to all the VBM ballots that are delivered on election day. The bottleneck is the manual process of removing the folded ballots from the vote-by-mail envelopes, unfolding the ballots, and flattening them out in preparation for scanning. This process is all manual and there is no equipment on the market to automate it. It is done in teams of two for transparency and accountability. ROV cannot add more people to the process because they are out of office space.</p> <p>On 11/25/2020 ROV experienced an outbreak of COVID-19. A total of 23 staff members tested positive and 75 additional staff members were placed on quarantine due to possible exposure. This occurred 8 days prior to the certification deadline and caused some unexpected delays. However, the election results were certified on time on 12/3/2020.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If vote-by-mail ballots are mailed to every voter for future elections, ROV recommends that the ballot opening process begin on the first day allowed by the State Gov Code in order to maximize how many ballots are included in the first results on Election Night. Prior to AB3370, Election officials could start to process ballots 10 days prior to election day. Current law now allows for the processing of ballots 15 days prior to election day. 2. We recommend examining and evaluating the cost of staffing to allow the department to run a 24/7 operation when necessary to meet the demand of a large-scale election. Operating a 24/7 operation will allow ROV to update the vote count more frequently. This request will come with a budgetary need that will have to be analyzed for the departments FY21/22 budget. 3. If a 24/7 operation is not feasible, we recommend after election day extending the amount of days that ROV works the night shift (6pm-3am). 4. Secure additional office space and staffing to allow ROV to process VBM ballots more expeditiously on election day.

CHALLENGE #4- VOTERS RECEIVED DUPLICATE BALLOTS

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE	Several voters contacted ROV with concerns about receiving more than one vote-by-mail ballot. There are many valid reasons that voters receive duplicate ballots. The most common reason is that there is an update to the voter's registration record. Updates to voter registration records have increased significantly since the implementation of automatic registration at the DMV and online voter registration. The DMV information is sent to us as a voter registration update which triggers the mailing of a replacement ballot even if it is the exact same address. Duplicate ballots are tied to one voter registration record and as soon as one ballot is returned the other ballot is automatically voided. If the second ballot is returned the data entry operators cannot process it because it is already voided in the system. That information is provided to the district attorney's office after the election since the voter attempted to vote twice.
RECOMMENDATION	Increase public outreach to explain the intricacies of conducting an election.

CHALLENGE #5 - STATEWIDE BALLOT TRACKING SYSTEM

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE	ROV was mandated to use the Secretary of State ballot tracking system. The county started issuing ballot mailing files on 9/10/2020. When the California Secretary of State turned on the ballot tracking system on 9/28/2020 it automatically sent a notification to all registered voters claiming that their ballots had been mailed on 09/10/2020 and that they should receive it within 7 days. This notification was inaccurate because the ballots did not start going in the mail until 10/5. Many voters contacted ROV during the week of 10/5 concerned that they had not received their ballot yet but had received the ballot tracking notification. The ballot tracking system is not updated until the signature is verified on the vote-by-mail envelope. The system does not provide real time information. Ballots dropped off by mail or at a drop-off location can take several days to be received at the ROV office and signature verified. This caused quite a few concerned phone calls from voters that dropped their ballot off and started checking the ballot tracking system the next day.
RECOMMENDATION	All the feedback has been provided to the California Secretary of State so that the ballot tracking system can be improved upon for future elections.

CHALLENGE #6 - EASTVALE & CATHEDRAL CITY ELECTIONS

<p>SUMMARY</p>	<p>The ROV had no legal authority to mail ballots to all voters until Senate Bill 29 was signed by the Governor on Friday, February 19. The ROV reached out to our ballot printing vendor on Tuesday, February 23 at 6:49pm and they confirmed that we had enough materials to mail the ballots. A mailing file with 11,502 records was provided to the ballot printing vendor on Thursday, February 25 at 12:35pm. The ballot printing vendor delivered the ballots to the post office on Monday March 1, the day before the election. Several voters in both Eastvale and Cathedral City did not receive their Vote-by-mail ballots until after the day of the March 2020 Special election.</p> <p>The supplemental ballots in the mailing file were intended to provide an opportunity for non-permanent VBM voters to receive a VBM ballot. The supplemental ballots did not preclude a voter from voting at a polling place as noted in the voter information guide that was mailed. Various Counties across the state conducted special elections in March and were not impacted by SB 29. These counties are members of the Voters Choice Act, which already requires them to send a VBM ballot to all registered voters.</p>
<p>ROV RESPONSE</p>	<p>The ROV did not become aware of the Governor signing SB 29 until Tuesday, Feb - 23, and the Secretary of State did not send an advisory until Thursday, February 25.</p> <p>A mailing file with 11,502 records was provided to the ballot printing vendor on Thursday, February 25 at 12:35pm. ROV's understanding was that mailing files were processed under 48 regular hours not business hours and this was never communicated by the vendor. Unfortunately, the ballot printing vendor did not deliver the ballots to the post office until Monday March 1, the day before the election. The expectation of ROV was that the ballots would be delivered to the USPS no later than Saturday February 27. In prior elections, appointments were not required by the USPS to deliver ballots on Saturdays.</p> <p>It is common practice for the ROV to take all of the VBM applications received on the Tuesday before Election Day and data enter all of those on Wednesday and then send their final mailing file to the vendor on the Wednesday or Thursday before Election Day. ROV has never experienced a vendor mailing ballots the day before the election. Had the mailing delay been communicated by the vendor the ROV would have reviewed options with County Counsel and the Executive Office.</p>
<p>VENDOR RESPONSE</p>	<p>The vendor's turnaround time for a file is 48 hours (2 business days). They received the file on Thursday, February 25 resulting in a drop date at the USPS on Monday, March 1. They did not have a discussion with ROV about a guaranteed drop date.</p> <p>The USPS has stated that First Class Mail can take between 1 to 5 business days to be delivered. They have always recommended that Counties do not mail out ballot packets any later than the Wednesday prior to the election date. Despite their recommendation they will always process files if they are requested by a County. The USPS does not typically accept mail drops on Saturday without prior scheduling, which they in turn begin the processing of the mail on the following business day. In this case, they did not receive the files from the ROV on time to request a drop at the USPS on that Saturday.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore all options for a new vendor to print and mail ballots for future elections. 2. For future elections increase coordination with the Executive Office. 3. Express our concerns to the Secretary of State regarding the special election. 4. Set clear written time frames for the vendor to deliver ballots to the USPS.

TIMELINE OF MARCH SPECIAL ELECTION

DATE	TIMELINE	VENDOR RESPONSE
Friday, February 19	Governor signs SB29	
Tuesday, February 23 6:49pm	ROV became aware that the bill was signed by the Governor and sends an email to the vendor enquiring if they have enough supplies to mail the remaining ballots.	The vendor confirms that they have enough supplies to send all ballots.
Thursday, February 25 12:35pm	Voting Records are sent to the vendor	Standard supplemental turn time is 48 hours/ 2 business days. The ETA for this delivery to the USPS was Monday, March 1st
Friday, February 26	County press release is issued informing the public of the impact of SB29	
Saturday, February 27	ROV's understanding was that the vendor would deliver all ballots to USPS on this day.	The vendor did not drop off ballots on this day because the USPS requires at least a week's notice to drop off ballots on a Saturday. ROV delivered the file to the vendor on Thursday, February 25 at 12:35pm.
Sunday, February 28	ROV emails both Cathedral City and Eastvale to inform them of the impact of SB29 and states "the additional ballots were mailed last week to the remaining voters in compliance with SB 29"	Ballots were not delivered to the USPS until Monday March, 1
Monday, March 1	Vendor delivers ballots to the USPS	USPS states that first class mail delivery time is 1-5 days. The vendor does not recommend mailing ballots later than the Wednesday prior to the election date
Tuesday, March 2	Election Day	

CHALLENGE #7 - COMMUNICATION & COORDINATION

EXECUTIVE OFFICE RESPONSE	ROV experienced many challenges this last election cycle. Many were related to COVID and modifications of past election practices via Executive Orders and State legislative changes. We believe that having enhanced communication protocols between the Executive Office and the ROV can help us better prepare for future elections.
RECOMMENDATION	We recommend that the ROV work with the Executive Office on developing a written staffing, resource and communication plan, including technology needs with clear delivery timelines for future elections. This recommendation is intended to improve the communication, coordination, and collaboration of ROV and all the various stakeholders of the election process. We want to ensure that ROV has all the resources available to conduct an efficient election.

CHALLENGE #8- VOTING ASSISTANCE CENTERS

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE	<p>Prior to 2020, ROV established approximately 600 polling places and hired 3,500 poll workers located throughout Riverside County on Election Day. Most of the previous polling place locations and long-serving poll workers were not willing to commit to serve as a polling place during the November Election due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the ROV determined that it was not going to be possible to recruit 600 polling places and 3,500 poll workers for the November Election. The California Legislature authorized the use of consolidated vote centers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The voter assistance centers had to be open for the 3 days prior to Election Day for at least 8 hours each day and on Election Day from 7:00am to 8:00pm. ROV ended up establishing 130 Voter Assistance Centers throughout Riverside County. The 130 Voter Assistance Center locations were allocated based on percentage of registered voters in each municipality and unincorporated communities. A draft list of Voter Assistance Centers was posted to the website in early September to allow for public comment. A final list of 130 locations was published in late September.</p>
RECOMMENDATION	<p>Explore the option of implementing the California Voters Choice Act for future elections. The November Election was conducted similar to the California Voters Choice Act but there are a few more mandates included in the California Voters Choice Act. A lot of the infrastructure to implement the California Voters Choice Act has already been purchased but additional equipment is needed to improve wait times and decrease lines on Election Day.</p>

IMPROVEMENT MATRIX

The team took into consideration all the thoughts and feedback that were received from our interviews to put together the following improvement matrix at the end of this report. We believe the implementation of all the initiatives can assist ROV in future elections. Several of the recommendations will require the assistance of multiple departments. The review team asks that ROV come back to the BOS by the end of July 2021 with a status update of the following proposals. There are cost implications that may be considered and will require a potential budget adjustment.

SUMMARY

There is little doubt that important lessons have been learned from this historic election. It was a massive undertaking for ROV to conduct an election of this magnitude in the middle of a pandemic and with new regulations dictated by the State. There was a multitude of departments that worked tirelessly in the background to help administer the November election, the Registrar of Voters, County Counsel, RCIT, Sheriff's Department, and the entire County PIO team. Their work truly demonstrates the collective meaning of teamwork to ensure a fair, democratic, and accurate election in Riverside County. The review team asks that the ROV come back to the BOS with a status update and cost analysis of the recommend proposals in this report by the end of July 2021.

IMPROVEMENT MATRIX

IMPROVEMENT	ACTION	DEPARTMENT
PROPERTY SPACE	Work with the Real Estate Division to identify additional office and parking space for future elections.	Real Estate, ROV and EO
24 HOUR OPERATIONS	Anticipate budgetary needs to increase the number of full time and seasonal employees to implement 24-hour operations when necessary to meet the demand of large-scale elections (e.g. presidential, gubernatorial) and to certify the election results faster.	ROV, EO, and HR
PUBLIC OUTREACH	Develop a public outreach plan to be used for future elections	ROV, and EO
WEBSITE	Create a new website for ROV.	RCIT, EO and ROV
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER	Explore the possibility of hiring a full time Public Information Officer for ROV	EO and ROV
RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES	Expand recruiting opportunities to target local high schools, colleges, universities, and job fairs.	ROV, EO and HR
TRAINING	Implement scenario-based training for all ROV employees	ROV and EO
PARTNER WITH RCIT	Provide RCIT a tutorial of ROV's software's and applications.	ROV, EO and RCIT
DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION	Increase the involvement of the Executive Office in the months prior to the Primary and General elections to help strategize and plan accordingly.	ROV and EO
USPS	Explore the possibility to add a USPS Processing center in Riverside County	EO Legislative Team
VOTER GUIDES	Purchase additional Adobe In-Design licenses to streamline the voter information guide proofing process and ensure delivery of the voter guides to the USPS one week prior.	ROV, EO and RCIT
HOST PUBLIC MEETINGS	Explore the possibility of hosting public meetings to increase voter information prior to the General election	ROV and EO
CONTINGENCY PLANS	Establish stronger contingency plans for mechanical breakdowns of equipment	ROV, EO and RCIT
OBSERVERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observers will be asked to sign a dedicated acknowledgment form regarding the rules and guidelines of the observing process. 2. Establish a designated check-in and check-out area for observers that does not interfere with ongoing operations. 3. Publish the time that the signature verification of the ballots will be performed. 	County Counsel, ROV, and EO