

## General Registrar's & Electoral Board Workgroup

Minutes

The meeting was called to order on September 4, 2014, at 1:10PM by SBE Chairman Charles E. Judd. Attending were Co-Chairs John Hager and Jean Jensen, electoral board (EBs) members William Bell, Renee Andrews, Tommy Doxey, and Robin Lind; general registrar's (GRs) Larry Haake, Tracy Howard, and Barbara Gunter. Representing the Department of Elections (ELECT); Commissioner Edgardo Cortés, ELECT Policy Analyst Martha Brissette, ELECT Liaison Rose Mansfield and members of the public.

Chairman Judd requested that members introduce themselves with brief descriptions of their background in the elections community. He described group dynamics as a five step process: Get Acquainted Stage, Why Are We Here, Bid for Power Phase, Constructive Phase where work gets done, and the "Esprit".

Guidelines: Respect Others, Be Clear & Brief, OK to Disagree, Everyone Participate, Maintain Positive Attitude, Observe Time Limits, Avoid Side Conversations, and Be Solution-Minded.

Tracy Howard delivered a condensed version of his presentation on the evolution of duties and responsibilities of general registrars and electoral boards from the earliest stages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when voter registration was introduced, to the present voting, through the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the creation of the position of Commissioner of Elections effective July 1, 2014.

Co-Chair Jean Jensen introduced the discussion of goals and strategies with a suggestion that the 10 tasks be prioritized. Discussion ensued on the first two tasks, which involve gathering data;

(i) Analyzing existing voter registration data for the cost of administering the current system at state and local levels. The Workgroup agreed to delegate this task to the Department of Elections;

(ii) Gathering local data over the four-year elections cycle to determine costs per vote in each locality. General Registrars, Mr. Haake, Mr. Howard and Ms. Gunter, agreed to take on the task of formulating a survey to be sent to all GRs seeking costs;

Discussion ensued on the third task (iii) Examine duties of GRs and EBs as set out in code and regulations with the agreement that this information already exists on SharePoint. Ms. Brissette informed the GREB Workgroup that the information has been prepared and is available for review.

Discussion ensued on tasks (iv) and (v) fifth tasks with comments: "*there is great diversity between small and large jurisdictions.*" Conclusion: Some EBs in smaller localities are performing their statutory work and those EBs in larger localities have

47 delegated most to staff. Chairman Judd commented: “It may be time to suggest to  
48 the General Assembly that it visit the structure of the local election offices and  
49 suggested that they follow suit with the Department of Elections and appoint a  
50 director of elections rather than general registrar.”

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52 On tasks (iv) and (v) Mr. Haake suggested that a general document of how the  
53 system is organized be compiled and distributed to the localities asking how their  
54 local model varies from the established system. All members of the GREB  
55 Workgroup were in agreement.

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57 Mr. Hager commented on the “global” nature of the tasks and emphasized the  
58 importance of hitting the highlights while getting the information that is relevant.  
59 Mr. Hager stated it would be prudent to seek subject matter expertise when  
60 necessary.

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62 Mr. Haake suggested and the group agreed on tasks (vi) and (vii) to add questions to  
63 the survey being prepared by the GRs for task (ii). Ms. Andrews suggested that  
64 Policy Analyst Myron McClees help with task vii relating to workload impact of  
65 changes in the ways votes are cast on and preceding Election Day. Ms. Brisette  
66 agreed to communicate the request.

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68 Mr. Howard distributed the list of total registered voters from 1976 (taken from the  
69 ELECT Website), with turnout and absentee numbers in November General  
70 Elections (2012); the growth from 29,970 absentee voters in 1977 to 447,907 in  
71 2012 is an indicator of change in local duties and workload.

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73 Mr. Haake provided a list of legislative mandates introduced since 1996 through  
74 2014 and discussed the overwhelming absentee turnout in 2008 General Election.  
75 Mr. Howard and Mr. Bell stated that their localities had similar experiences.

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77 Ms. Jensen suggested members recruit “A neighbor” to visit a locality website. The  
78 challenge would be to find voter registration information on the local jurisdiction  
79 website. This feedback would improve the usability of the website for voters seeking  
80 information and give priority to election information.

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82 Mr. Hager suggested the workgroup include the impact of technology. Mr. Hager  
83 requested clarity be provided as to those technological advances that are beneficial  
84 to voters and those that put an extra burden on general registrar’s office. Ms. Gunter  
85 commented that technology has also shifted workload previously handled by the  
86 ELECT to local general registrars.

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88 Ms. Andrews suggested that qualitative data, quantitative data, and anecdotal  
89 accounts are included with the information. Mr. Haake suggested adding staffing,  
90 space, and supplies to the survey on task (vi) and Mr. Bell suggested examining  
91 administrative duties the local jurisdictions have added to the general registrar’s in

92 their role as managers, e.g., time cards, budget preparation and personnel  
93 evaluations.  
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95 Discussion ensued regarding the State Compensation Board as a source of data for  
96 staffing. Ms. Gunter suggested that the State Compensation Board could compare  
97 duties to what was expected to be accomplished for a locality of such a size and  
98 what staffing numbers and the required skill sets. Ms. Brissette suggested that a  
99 recent change in the Code (24.2-107) supports comparing the general registrar  
100 position to the Circuit Court Clerk.  
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102 Mr. Haake suggested that the Workgroup pause and gather data from the State  
103 Compensation Board on comparable compensation and staffing.  
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105 Mr. Hager stated that the data gathered is necessary to discuss what is important  
106 and guide the workgroup members on their goals. Mr. Hager proposed the question:  
107 “Will the data support those goals?”  
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109 Discussion ensued on tasks assignments, and Ms. Jensen asked if minutes were  
110 being taken; she then asked if Mr. Lind would create minutes from his notes.  
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112 Ms. Jensen asked: “Is anything missing from the list of tasks? ... not specifically tied  
113 to these ten.” Ms. Jensen directed Mr. Lind to prepare a perspective from regarding  
114 the EB side on what is important for EBs in the study process to achieve desired  
115 outcomes. Mr. Lind agreed to do so with the input from other EB members.  
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117 Mr. Lind stated: “The Co-Chairs’ perspective is more valuable because other  
118 members are too close to the forest to see the trees; he said the suggestion of  
119 creating a Director of Elections to replace general registrar might be a time to  
120 consider replacing EBs; do we need EBs if we don’t need GRs? It’s wide open query,  
121 gather data, and see what’s important.”  
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123 Discussion ensued regarding task (x) to seek out “best practices” beyond simply  
124 having EBs comprised of two different political parties watching over each other. A  
125 suggestion presented was creating a “Best Practices” award and presenting the  
126 award at VEBA, VRAV and ELECT annual meetings.  
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128 Ms. Jensen asked Mr. Lind to contact Staff Attorney Meg Burruss of Legislative  
129 Services to seek information on “Best Practices” in the Commonwealth and the  
130 National Conference of State Legislatures or Election Center for the same in other  
131 states.  
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133 Mr. Hager summarized the goals: Gather as much information as possible at this  
134 stage; then ask what do you want to accomplish; and what can be done to help the  
135 process be equitable about this?  
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137 Ms. Andrews raised the question of how the Freedom of Information Act applied to  
138 the Workgroup and to any sub-committees. A lively discussion followed with Mr.  
139 Judd explaining that the Constitutional Oath was not administered to the  
140 WorkGroup members at the beginning of the meeting on the advice of the Attorney  
141 General's office which had reservations about creating members as Officers of the  
142 Commonwealth. Mr. Hager said there was no objection to the Workgroup  
143 communications being "FOIAble." Martha Brissette explained her understanding  
144 that the Workgroup and any sub-committees are public bodies as defined in the  
145 Virginia Freedom of Information Act in § 2.2-3701 and she agreed to follow up with  
146 the Office of Attorney General to confirm that understanding. An informal  
147 suggestion was made that all email communications within the group be copied to  
148 ELECT Liaison Rose Mansfield.

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150 Discussion ensued about time required for creating the survey, receiving responses  
151 and analyzing data. Subsequently the group agreed to set the next meeting for  
152 October 7, 2014 at 1 PM in the Washington Building-Room B27, 1100 Bank Street,  
153 Richmond, Virginia.

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155 There being no further business, the Workgroup adjourned at 3:47PM.

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159 Co-Chair Jean Jensen

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165 Co-Chair John Hager