



The Elections & Voting Information Center
Reed College

Oregon County Election Staffing Research Study

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Election Administration in Oregon

- Counties tasked with administering all federal, state and local elections.
- Most Oregon Counties served by County Clerk
- Clerk's duties are diverse: **Recording and Election Duties**
Probate, County Records, Grazing District, Mining Districts
Marriage Licenses, Property Tax Appeals...



Elections Offices in Oregon

- Clerks are charged with many duties – including elections.
- Election offices in in different parts of the County Government.
- Despite a common set of rules and requirements, each county varies by organizational design and budget resources.
- **Clerks and Election Directors** play a key role in voter engagement, and election legitimacy. They are **the face of democracy to millions of Oregonians.**



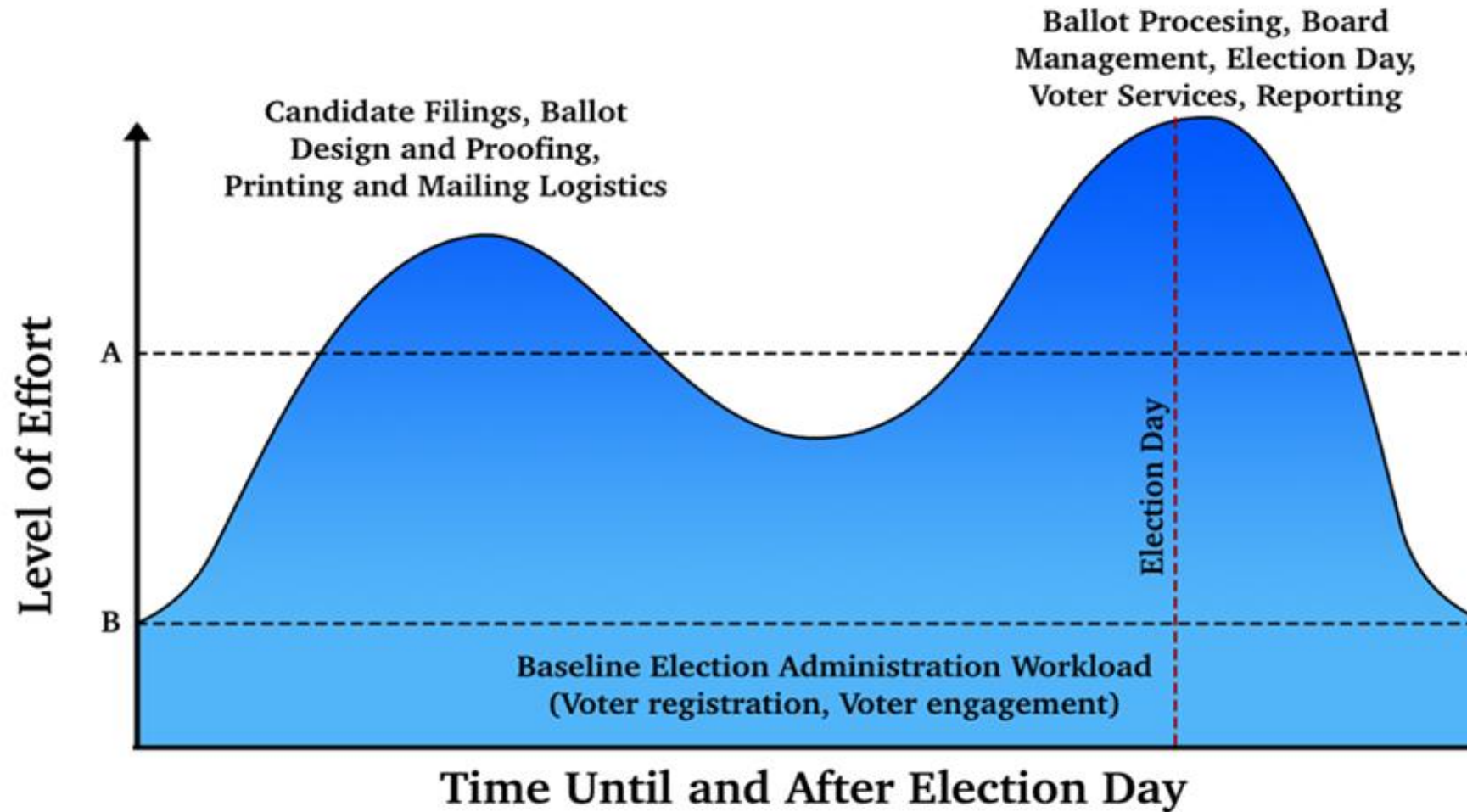
County Funding Challenges

- **Oregon's funding model for elections is inadequate for election needs.** Funding is tied to real estate market, and disconnected from actual election workload.
- Legacies of Measure 50 – **uneven permanent rates** create uneven funding across counties.

Election Workload

- Critical source of change is the election cycle itself: **rarely a down period.**
- Generally, **the peak of election activity starts** with candidate filings, **about 100 days prior to the election**, and then **tapers off 2-3 weeks after** the election.
 - Active election season is approximately 4 months long.
- In **even-numbered years**, this means there are **at least 8 months of intense election work.**

Election Workload: Peaks Stretch Capacity



Key Staffing Pressures

- Staff recruitment and retention are hampered by **out of date job classifications, compensation, and perceptions of the work.**
- **Staffing is at or below staffing levels a decade ago.** Rapid legal changes and political environment create pressure.
- Local election offices are anticipating **retirements, resignations, and loss of expertise.**
- Since our interviews 5-6 departures.



Staffing Levels and Voter to Staff Ratios

| | Full-Time Staff Counts | | | Voter to Staff Ratios | | |
|-------------|------------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|---------|---------|
| County Size | Average | Maximum | Minimum | Average | Maximum | Minimum |
| Large | 6.7 | 12.0 | 2.5 | 46,914 | 63,971 | 30,364 |
| Medium | 1.7 | 5.8 | 0.1 | 25,015 | 73,760 | 2,126 |
| Small | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1,322 | 1,460 | 1,075 |
| Overall | 2.7 | 12.0 | 0.1 | 27,433 | 73,760 | 1,075 |

Changing Nature of the Work

- New rules and new technology have made the work of elections far more complex.
- Elections are now year-long processes. **Elections work is more frequent and the peaks of activity are higher.**
- Many offices shared that **outreach, public engagement, and voter education are priorities** for new hires.

Changing Political Environment

- **Public records requests have a large impact on work.** County responses are varied.
- Election officials and staff are subject to **abuse, threats, and harassment.**
- Requirement to add **active shooter training, hardening offices, and increasing security broadly.**

Challenge: Compensation and Classification

- **Staff pay and compensation were reported as a frequent challenge** for hiring and keeping election staff. Benefits are a positive
- **Competition with other county departments** to retain staff.
- Mismatch between the **work in practice and content of job descriptions.**

Challenge: Staff Recruitment

- Applicant pools are very place-based (and impacted by housing costs).
- Prior experience is rare, focus on other skills that transfer.
- Local industries or even other County offices compete to limit applicant pools.
 - *“...the In-N-Out Burger across the street can out-pay me.”*
- Pay can be low for the stress and public scrutiny of the job.

Challenge: Staff Training and Development

- Few offices have formalized training programs.
- Most use mentoring and on-the-job training to develop skills.
- With so many people to train, but also with so many fewer experienced hands, the pace of work was inhibits training.

Future of Election Administration Jobs

- Hiring needs now include:
 - Public engagement skills
 - Technology-centered skills
 - Understanding social media
- Need for **job analysis and compensation studies** that fit the reality of elections
- OACC can be a key resource, but barriers to use by all counties.
 - Cost
 - Travel Time
 - Staff Availability

Recommendation: Communications

- Institutionalize communications between the Oregon SOS Division of Elections, the OACC, and Oregon Counties:
 - Create an Official OACC and Local Clerk Liaison within the Division of Elections office.
 - Develop a single point of contact for Clerks, staff, and the OACC.

Recommendation: Training

- Develop a **common training portfolio** for **election offices**; seek out funding or other alternatives to **expand access**.
 - Expand these trainings or develop new self-guided programs across all aspects of election administration to help reduce the need for each office to develop their own program.
 - Support access to training for counties unable to attend OACC conferences and training to reduce inequities between counties, improve election administration quality, and retain staff.

Recommendation: Public Records

- Standardize or potentially consolidate public records requests processes for various types of emerging public requests.
 - Create a new statewide position in the Elections Division to support counties in addressing public records requests.
 - Encourage the use of intake forms for public records requests.
 - Charge for your time and labor.

Recommendation: Recruitment and Retention

- Improve staff recruitment and retention.
 - Encourage statewide (and broader) advertisement of open positions.
 - Develop tools to screen and evaluate temporary workers or board members that can be shared as best practices.
 - Collect and disseminate compensation and job classification studies.
 - Coordinate with statewide Human Resources offices.
 - Focus on recruitment to support succession planning for Clerks and Election Directors.

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