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Training for Election Officials and Precinct Managers

We reviewed the training available to county election officials and precinct managers to determine if it was adequate and appropriate. We found that the SEC could offer more training online and on the weekends. The SEC has also not offered training in various locations around the state, as required by state law.

We found no evidence that county election commissioners and voter registration board members have been removed or replaced when they fail to comply with certification and training requirements. State law calls for removal by the Governor and proviso 79.7 in the FY 11-12 appropriations act states that the counties' legislative delegations must replace non-compliant members on the board or commission.

Laws Governing Training

State law requires county registration board members and county election commissioners and staff to complete, within 18 months after appointment or reappointment, a training and certification program conducted by the State Election Commission. One continuing education course is required annually thereafter. Failure to complete those requirements calls for notification to the Governor, who must remove the member from that board, unless an extension of time is granted by the Governor.

Policies and Information About Training

The State Election Commission provides four-day core training seminars for election commissioners, voter registration board appointees (members) and county election staff to attain certification, and it determines which courses will be offered for each session.

There are 3 types of certifications required for county members and staff, within 18 months after appointment or employment:

- County voter registration and election commission members (members) are required to complete a total of seven courses — three core courses, two election electives, and two general components of choice.
- County voter registration and election commission directors are required to complete eight courses — four core courses, two election electives, and two general components of choice.
- County voter registration and election commission staff are required to complete five courses — two core courses, two election electives, and one component of choice.

Core and elective courses are offered periodically for each type of certification. The State Election Commission determines a curriculum to satisfy the requirements for each of the training certificates. Once members become certified, at least one continuing education course is required annually in order to remain current. No testing is required to earn certification and continuing education. According to an SEC official, one core class is available online for commissioners and board members and others are being developed. Many classes utilize participation discussions of election issues which are not applicable to online training.

The training is held in the SEC office in Columbia and led by current staff and SEC resources. There are no specific policies and procedures that guide training. The three training sessions that were offered in 2012 — April, July, and December — were held at the State Election Commission offices in Columbia. Proviso 79.7 states that the SEC shall make these courses available in various locations, including the upstate, coastal, and midlands areas of the state. The SEC states that the training sessions are not offered at various locations due to budget reductions.

An SEC official described weaknesses in the program as keeping up with changes in elections, updating the various resource documents impacted by laws and rulings, and dealing with unknown future implications.

Recommendation

13. The State Election Commission should offer core training courses for county election commissioners and voter registration board members and staff in various locations of the state, as required by proviso 79.7.
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Delinquent Reports for Certification and Training

The State Election Commission sends to the county directors quarterly delinquent certification and training reports that show the training history of each election commissioner, voter registration board member, and staff in that county. It is the responsibility of the county directors to review the reports for non-compliance, notify the SEC of discrepancies, and ensure that staff attends the required training.

According to the SEC, a summary copy is sent to the Governor annually, listing only the names, by county, of members who are delinquent in their certification and training requirements. The Governor's office does not notify the SEC of actions taken for non-compliance. SEC records did not indicate any time extensions having been granted during 2012 for members to gain compliance.

Copies of reports that were sent to county directors for quarters ending March 31 and June 30, 2012, showed:

- 24 counties had members who were non-compliant.
 - 23 members were not certified and had served longer than 18 months.
 - 3 certified members did not complete continuing ed training in 2010.
 - 29 certified members did not complete continuing ed training in 2011.
 - 20 members were certified from 1 to 11 years after their 18-month deadline.
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Stipends

The election commissioners and voter registration board members may be paid a stipend of up to \$1,500 per year, not to exceed \$12,500 per county, according to proviso 79.1 in the FY 11-12 appropriations act. Proviso 79.7 states that the SEC is required to withhold stipends if those members do not complete the training and certification program as required by state law. The SEC notifies each county treasurer after the end of each quarter of members in that county who are eligible to be paid stipends, and the amount of the stipend, and those who are ineligible to be paid.

We examined copies of the memos that were sent to the 46 county treasurers on July 13, 2012. We found that only active election commissioners and voter registration board members were paid stipends in the fourth quarter of FY 11-12. Members who were listed on the 6-30-12 Delinquent Training Program report for the Governor were correctly named in the county memos as 'ineligible' and were not paid a stipend for service. A total of \$102,227.64 was paid to certified members after the fourth quarter of FY 11-12. A total of \$13,590.26 was withheld from those members who were not compliant during the same period.

Actions from the Governor's Office

We found no evidence that county election commissioners and voter registration board members have been removed or replaced when they fail to comply with certification and training requirements. The division of boards and commissions of the Governor's office is responsible for removing any election members who are non-compliant in their certification and continuing education training, as required by state law. Proviso 79.7, in the appropriations act since FY 08-09, states that the counties' legislative delegations must replace non-compliant members on the board or commission.

Recommendation

14. Election commissioners and voter registration board members who fail to earn training certification within the established time period should be removed and replaced.

Training for Poll Workers

S.C. Code §7-13-72 states that no person may be appointed as a precinct manager who has not been certified as having completed a training program concerning his duties and responsibilities as a precinct manager. The training program must be approved by the State Election Commission but is carried out by the county election commission.

According to an SEC training official, precinct managers (workers) and clerks (lead managers) are provided online training in setting up the precincts and managing the machines. A county trainer further explained that the clerks are responsible for the activity of the precincts. Their instruction is more extensive with hands-on training in opening, closing, and reporting procedures with the machines. Precinct managers are paid a per diem of \$60 for two days and precinct clerks are paid a per diem of \$60 for three days.

The SEC prepares online training courses for precinct managers and clerks. There are ten modules in the online poll manager course, composed of lectures, activities, and videos, and most are concluded with a course quiz. A user survey of the entire course is required for feedback before full credit is given for the training. Topics include setting up and closing the polling places, processing voters, solving voting day issues, and serving voters with disabilities. One module includes tutorials for opening and closing the iVotronic voting machines, and others address printing zero tapes and closing tapes with voting results.

Training Survey of County Election Directors

We sent a survey to the 46 county election directors regarding training that is provided by the State Election Commission. Thirty-six of the 46 (78.3%) county election directors responded. The survey focused on core training for commissioners and directors, as well as online and other training for poll managers and clerks.

Thirty-three (91.7%) of the respondents agreed that the SEC offers enough core classes to achieve the mandatory certification within 18 months for board members and staff. Three responded that more classes should be scheduled and at more convenient times. Three requested online core training, and expressed a need for more training than they are getting. Other comments referred to the lack of classes and alternatives, such as online training or week-end classes, and that they would like to see more classes for directors and commissioners.

Thirty (83.3%) agreed that SEC training is adequate to perform specific election jobs. Five comments expressed concern that managers get no core training in audit processes, such as Unity, iVotronic, VREMS, scanning, etc. (see *Survey of County Election Officials on the Post-Election Audit Process*). One concern was directed to Unity, the system used to prepare voting machines for elections. Other than the initial training received when the machines were new in 2004, there has been no continuing education and new appointees and new hires get no training on Unity.

All 36 responses asserted that their precinct managers get training and instructions other than online training provided by the SEC. Thirty-three (91.7%) responded that first-time poll managers also get personal training, in addition to online training.

Thirty-five counties (97.2%) reported that precinct clerks get training in addition to SEC online courses for running the precincts, and 36 (100%) reported that precinct clerks get hands-on training on the machines. All counties responded that precinct clerks are provided a checklist of procedures for opening the polls and another checklist for closing the polls, operating the voting machines, and reporting the total votes.

Counties are responsible for assuring that precinct managers and clerks are trained to manage the precincts. Satisfactory completion of the online training is required prior to each election and before per diems are paid for managing the polls. Precinct workers are provided a poll managers handbook for study and reference. Online training, personal instructions from the county offices, and familiarity with the poll managers handbook prepares poll managers and clerks to effectively operate the voting precincts on Election Day.

Other States

We were asked to evaluate other states' methods of training their election officials. In a review of Election Administration Profiles of All Fifty States, published by the Center for Democracy and Election Management, we found no state that offered online courses for election officials and county board members. Some states were then contacted for additional information. South Carolina and three other states provided online training for their precinct workers.

Only one state was identified that requires testing of its county board members, directors, and staff before they are granted certification. Offering online training to election officials and county board members would:

- Avoid inconvenient meeting locations and travel expense.
- Accommodate the individual's personal schedule to acquire training.
- Strengthen learning when tested, by allowing instant review of problem areas.

Recommendations

15. The State Election Commission should evaluate the training offered to election officials, directors, and staff to determine if training can be offered online, or on weekends, or if additional training courses are needed.
16. The State Election Commission should consider testing officials, directors, and staff on core training to assure understanding of election rules and laws.