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October 7, 2015

Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: 2015 Municipal Elections After-Action Report

Summary

Pursuant to instruction from the Los Angeles City Council, the Office of the City Clerk (City Clerk) hereby submits this report on the conduct of the 2015 Municipal Elections for consideration. This report will briefly review and discuss election operations, new election procedures, recent initiatives, and the City Clerk's post-election agenda regarding voter engagement.

Administratively, the 2015 Municipal Elections were a success and occurred with no significant challenges. Some of the factors that contributed to this success were as follows:

- Integration of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Polling Place Accessibility Survey into pre-election operations;
- Modification of over 100 polling places with equipment to improve voter accessibility;
- Enhanced outreach efforts to multilingual and student poll workers;
- Introduction of a new poll worker survey;
- Upgraded Election Day call monitoring system;
- Implementation of an Election Day supply dispatch application;
- Expansion of voter outreach programs;
- Implementation of full election services in three additional languages, increasing the number of federally-mandated languages to 11, and;
- Integration of new vote-by-mail requirements.

The following will discuss these factors as well as the City Clerk's efforts to address post-election issues regarding legislative changes and voter engagement.

Recommendation

That the Los Angeles City Council note and file the 2015 Municipal Elections After-Action Report.

Fiscal Impact Statement

This report will have no fiscal impact.

Discussion

The 2015 Municipal Elections, consisting of the Primary Nominating and General Elections, were held on March 3 and May 19, 2015, respectively. Contests were held for even-numbered Los Angeles City Council seats and odd-numbered seats for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board of Education and the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) Board of Trustees. Charter Amendments 1 and 2 were also presented to voters in the March primary election. Please note that the General Election was smaller in size, due to the fact that the LACCD implemented a new rule that allowed contests for Board of Trustee seats to be decided by plurality, thus eliminating the need for runoff elections.

Although there were several competitive races in each election, along with high-profile charter amendments, voter turnout was low. In March, the overall turnout was 9.9%. In May, the turnout for four runoff contests was 9.7%. In March, 57.5% of all ballots cast were by mail, while in May, 64.3% of all ballots were cast by mail.

Nevertheless, the elections were operationally a success. In the spirit of the Mayor's call for enhancing the quality of City services, the City Clerk introduced or improved a number of new processes into this election cycle, all of which were implemented successfully.

Polling Place Recruitment

Starting with the LAUSD Board 1 Special Runoff Election in August 2014, the City Clerk began implementation of the California Secretary of State's Polling Place Accessibility Guidelines. The guidelines, and accompanying survey, were designed to help election officials ensure that polling places are accessible to voters with disabilities. Since August 2014, the City Clerk has surveyed a total of 232 polling places, exceeding its goal of 200 for the 2015 Municipal Elections.

In conjunction with the ADA survey, the City Clerk also purchased equipment to improve accessibility in 100 polling places. This equipment includes temporary ramps, threshold ramps, disabled parking placards, and call bells that allow voters to contact poll workers from their vehicle. Overall, the City Clerk modified 100 polling places with this equipment to improve voter accessibility.

Poll Worker Recruitment

For the 2015 Municipal Elections, the City Clerk recruited a combined 13,400 poll workers to staff over 2,000 precincts across the City and neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, the City Clerk trained nearly eighty percent of our Election Day work force, incorporating two new "how to" training videos as part of the training curriculum.

In 2015, the City Clerk continued efforts to recruit and hire bilingual poll workers, high school students, and City employee poll workers (CEPs). These three sets of poll workers are placed in polls to supplement traditional community poll workers where a specific need is established. Overall, the City Clerk recruited 2,500 student workers and 900 city employees for both elections. In addition, as a result of new outreach strategies, the number of bilingual poll workers recruited increased by nearly 50% since the 2013 Municipal Elections.

The City Clerk also introduced a new Poll Worker Survey, which was made available to all poll workers. The survey was designed to better understand the demographic composition of the City's poll workers, their motivations to serve, and the level of satisfaction with their training and Election Day experience.

The survey was relatively successful, with a 62% response rate in the primary election and an 83% response rate for the general election. The City Clerk learned that our poll workers were more likely to be:

- Age 56+
- Female
- Native born
- Hispanic, White, or African American
- Retired
- Bilingual

This information, along with other data gathered in the survey, will allow the City Clerk to explore options for identifying new pools of poll workers, strategically placing bilingual poll workers, and refining our training tools to include alternative methods, such as online videos.

Election Day Hotline and Emergency Response

Every election, the City Clerk monitors Election Day problems from its primary call center, Election Central. Election Central staff also supervises hundreds of field operatives who monitor the polls and respond to Election Day emergencies. This year, the City Clerk implemented two improved emergency response systems that ultimately resulted in faster call responses and faster resolutions to problems on Election Day.

First, the main Election Central hotline migrated from a largely paper-based call monitoring system to a paper-free electronic system. The system was also modified to allow hotline operators to identify and resolve problems faster and more accurately.

Second, the City Clerk introduced the Election Day Electronic Dispatching System, which allowed our hotline operators to transmit information regarding missing or malfunctioning polling place supplies directly to handheld tablets carried by supply delivery drivers located throughout the City for resolution. The live data these drivers received included problem descriptions and detailed audio and visual driving directions. By leveraging Google maps services, driving directions were readily available to the drivers. The system also allowed hotline operators to organize a driver's assignments by priority or location, and modify their assignments in real-time when necessary.

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In recognition of this innovation, the City Clerk was awarded the Mayor's Civic Innovation Award on June 10, 2015 and an Outstanding Project IT Award at the Los Angeles Digital Government Summit on August 25, 2015.

Voter Outreach

In 2015, the City Clerk continued to refine voter outreach efforts to recruit bilingual poll workers, register voters, and conduct voter education presentations. Utilizing a mapping application developed in-house, the City Clerk was able to identify and target communities with historically low voter participation rates and focus outreach efforts in those areas. Staff attended approximately 240 community events, conducted 100 voter education presentations, registered nearly 1,000 new voters, and recruited 1,600 new poll workers, over half of which were bilingual.

The City Clerk also expanded the "L.A. City votes!" Voter Outreach and Education campaign to include a new key partnership with LACCD and provided language assistance services in 11 different languages. In 2015, the City Clerk implemented full election services in Armenian, Russian, and Farsi languages, in addition to the services provided in Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

The City Clerk also expanded accessibility services by close captioning our current public service announcements (PSAs) and producing an additional "how to" video for voters with disabilities available in all 11 non-English languages. A total of 72 PSAs were produced for 2015.

Vote-By-Mail

Prior to the 2015 Municipal Elections, the City Clerk amended the City Election Code to allow the acceptance of vote-by-mail ballots postmarked on Election Day and received within three days after the election. In addition, upon the Council's recommendation, the City Clerk provided pre-paid postage for returned vote-by-mail ballots. Both changes were intended to foster greater vote-by-mail participation and to ensure that as many vote-by-mail ballots could be counted as possible.

Further details on the outcome of these new processes are detailed in a report (CF 13-1364) presented to the Rules, Elections, Intergovernmental Relations and Neighborhoods Committee on September 11, 2015.

Post-Election Agenda

While the 2015 Municipal Elections were an administrative success, the City Clerk is prepared to address issues that will affect future elections.

Charter Amendments 1 and 2

In general, Charter Amendments 1 and 2 changed the City's municipal election dates, from March and May of odd-numbered years to June and November of even-numbered years, beginning in the year 2020. In order to align current office terms for the City's elected officials and the LAUSD school board members, there will be no municipal elections in 2019. Municipal elections are still scheduled for March and May in 2017.

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Once the City's election dates are aligned with State and Federal elections, it will be possible for the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (County) to conduct the City's elections. The City Clerk will be working closely with County representatives on the progress of the County's new voting system and the development of a transition plan for the department.

Ongoing Voter Outreach

In response to instructions from the City Council and recommendations from the City of Los Angeles Municipal Election Reform Commission, the City Clerk will launch an ongoing, multi-faceted voter outreach program that will focus on voter registration, increasing voter awareness, and promoting a culture of voting. The City Clerk will also be working closely with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, Neighborhood Councils, and other civic and service organizations on joint voter outreach programs.

Conclusion

Building on the successes of the 2015 Municipal Elections, the City Clerk will continue to refine its operational processes and increase its efforts to engage and educate the public on the importance of local elections.

Recommendation

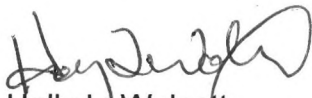
That the Los Angeles City Council note and file the 2015 Municipal Elections After-Action Report.

Fiscal Impact Statement

This report will have no fiscal impact.

If you have any questions regarding these proposed amendments, please contact me directly at (213) 978-1020.

Sincerely,



Holly L. Wolcott
City Clerk