

2021-2022

Comprehensive Election Audit Report



GUADALUPE COUNTY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In 2021, the Texas Legislature enacted [Senate Bill 1](#) (87th Leg., 2nd Called Special Session), which included a provision requiring the Office of the Secretary of State to conduct audits in four randomly selected counties. [Section 127.351](#) of the Texas Election Code provides that the Secretary of State shall conduct an audit of the elections held in the preceding two years after the most recent November uniform election occurring in an even-numbered year. On July 28, 2022, the Secretary of State conducted a drawing to determine which counties would be audited for the 2021-2022 election period. In this drawing, Guadalupe County, along with Cameron, Eastland and Harris counties, was selected as one of the counties to be audited in the 2021-2022 election cycle.

Comprehensive Findings

The audit of all elections conducted for the 2021-2022 election period revealed, as cited in this report, both election-specific concerns and broader patterns within the administration of elections in Guadalupe County. These findings identify areas in which the county is consistently meeting legal requirements and areas of needed improvement.

Notable Findings

Training of Election Workers & Community Engagement

Guadalupe County provides highly effective training programs for internal staff members, election workers, and the community. In addition to the four (4) one-hour training sessions for all new and returning election workers, the county has developed a comprehensive training manual for all election judges and workers. Though a limited amount of paperwork was missing required information or signatures, the majority of the polling location documentation was thoroughly completed allowing for the accurate reconciliation of election results.

The county elections staff routinely conducts post-election assessments of all processes and procedures. The election administrator stated, “every election is an opportunity to learn and to be better.” As part of the process, the county addressed self-identified areas of needed improvement and embarked on the development of an interactive curriculum for the community that became known as the Citizens Election Academy. The fundamental goal was to provide an educational course to allow attendees to better understand the overall election process and specifically how that works in their Guadalupe County. The election administrator expressed that it was an effort to invite the citizens of the county into their work to “see” firsthand how elections are administered in their county.

Election Security & Contingency Planning

Information technology and security services in Guadalupe County are run by Management Information Systems (MIS). Preventative measures are in place to help ensure election security, such as two factor authentications, network segmentation, end point detection, and constantly monitored firewalls. The county technology team follows best practices and security information specific to elections through active participation and coordination with Elections Infrastructure-Information Sharing & Analysis Center (EI-ISAC), the Department of Information Resources (DIR), and Texas Association of Counties (TAC).

The county currently hosts round table discussions related to emergency management and contingency protocols and consistently reevaluates this planning to ensure a continuity of operations in an event of any outage. Having experienced a ransomware attack during the audit period, Guadalupe County is using that experience and lessons learned to strengthen their information technology and security posture.

County Policies & Procedures

Guadalupe County has developed an extensive policies and procedures manual that details the procedural expectations of employees and their assigned functions. This manual is provided to all staff members upon hiring and covered in depth during initial training. The county cross trains all employees on the necessary functions related to voter registration and election administration. The election administrator prioritizes staff training to ensure that no responsibility is dependent on a single staff member, therefore eliminating any single point of failure.

Every person interviewed referenced the policies and procedures manual and articulated the importance of that document as a critical reference tool. Additionally, the interviewees were able to articulate all of the business process conducted within their office even though some of those responsibilities were not part of their typical daily responsibilities. The county election staff acknowledged that this commitment to thorough training was a product of experience and their shared commitment to conducting successful elections in the county.

Voter Registration & List Maintenance

Guadalupe County uses a third-party vendor to operate the county voter registration system. All counties utilizing a third-party vendor are required to submit data to the state system daily and to conduct a system synchronization at least once a month to ensure accuracy between the two systems. Guadalupe County has consistently complied with these requirements.

Both state and federal law require counties to continuously update their voter registration lists to ensure that only eligible voters are registered to vote in the county in which they reside. Guadalupe County consistently performs list maintenance activities and retains all required voter registration records in accordance with state law.

Guadalupe County should continue processing voter registration applications and record updates in a timely manner. Likewise, the county should continue to prioritize all list maintenance activities to ensure that only eligible voters are able to cast a vote in Guadalupe County.

Areas for Improvement

Election-Specific Security Planning

Though the county has numerous security measures currently in place as previously referenced, the county does not have a comprehensive Written Information Security Plan (WISP) related specifically to supporting and securing elections in Guadalupe County. This plan should include incident response planning and continuity of operations considerations. Likewise, a vendor risk management plan should be in place with all vendors providing services for the county election office and accessing sensitive and confidential voter registration and election data. Information security policies are provided to all key county personnel. However, as acknowledged by the county's information security personnel, a need for a more robust cyber security training for all staff members is needed and is currently being developed.

Conclusion

Guadalupe County is encouraged to continue implementing industry proven best practices and to formalize the security efforts currently in place. Guadalupe County has invested time and resources to develop an extensive county training program for election workers and has worked to provide educational opportunities to their community in order to educate their voters on the election process. Through a consistent self-auditing process following each election and a willingness to share their process with community members, Guadalupe County voters can be confident that their elections are conducted in a secure and transparent manner.