

To: Center for Technology and Civic Life
From: John Oldham, Fort Bend County Elections Administrator
Date: September 17, 2020
Re: Fort Bend County Safe Voting Plan

Overview

Fort Bend County, Texas, faces significant challenges in executing the November 3, 2020 general election.

Specifically, Fort Bend County faces the challenges of both keeping voters and poll workers safe as well as instilling in voters a sense that they would be safe casting a ballot in person. We also saw a tremendous increase in workload stemming from a 3-3 fold increase in absentee balloting as well as the challenges of adding additional polling locations to provide for social distancing.

For the general election, the number of **total registered voters is expected to be 475,000 with an estimated 360,000** casting ballots split between the two modes of voting. This document offers an assessment of resources needed for Fort Bend to safely and thoroughly prepare for the general election.

A preliminary budget overview estimate on top of what is already available to the County is as follows:

Absentee Ballot Assembly and Processing Equipment	\$103,000
Early Voting Sites and Ballot Drop-off Options	\$252,000
In-person Voting at Polling Places on Election Day	\$115,000
Secure Drop Boxes and Related Needs	\$6,500
Poll Worker Training	\$30,000
Total	\$506,500

Needs Assessment & Costs

The following sections outline initial details of the operation and costs associated with each of the aforementioned categories.

Absentee Ballot Assembly and Processing Equipment

For the November elections, we anticipate absentee-by-mail turnout to be somewhere around **35,000**. Automation will be critical to efficiently and accurately manage ballot envelopes and

ballots in weeks leading up to Election Day and in the canvassing process afterwards. To that end, the following is needed:

- **Personnel:** We currently have 8 hired to tabulate absentee-by-mail ballots. Due to the number of ballots we anticipate receiving for the November general election, we will need to hire an additional 6 for a total of 14 personnel to tabulate absentee-by-mail ballots.
We currently have 3 workers to process absentee ballot applications. We anticipate adding 5 additional personnel for a total of 8 personnel to process absentee ballot applications.
- **Processing Equipment:** To process absentee by mail ballot, we request \$4,500 for the purchase of an additional Fujitsu scanner to process returned ballot carrier envelopes.
- **We estimate the total cost of equipment delivery to be \$135,000. Approximately \$38,000 of which is due to additional polling locations. We also are attempting to purchase an additional 30 voter kiosk electronic poll books to facilitate voter check-ins at a cost of \$45,000.**

	<u>Total cost</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Unit costs</u>
Personnel: Poll workers Elec Day	\$36,075	185	\$195.00
Personnel: Early Voting	\$194,693	92	\$2,093.00
Equipment: Scanner & Poll Books	\$49,500.00		
Total: \$280,260			

Early Voting Sites and Ballot Drop-off Options

Fort Bend County plans to have **30** full-time early voting locations. These must be sufficiently staffed with **4-12** staff to limit worker turnover, handle a surge in voters before polls open, and manage sites in a pandemic environment. **It will cost \$312,000 to cover the total personnel costs of Early Voting.**

Secure Drop Boxes

In the primary, we had no of drop boxes installed. Drop boxes are not permitted in Texas but we plan on adding 4-5 staffed drop off locations to help ensure that voters have some opportunity to return their ballots if it may be too late to send via USPS. In addition to equipment costs and cameras, 8-12 additional personnel will be needed to accept ballots and deliver them to the Elections office over a 3 week period. Estimated cost will be between \$15,500 and \$22,000.

In-person Voting at Polling Places on Election Day

Fort Bend County is committed to working to secure many fully-staffed polling places on Election Day. For the primary, we lost **3** of Election Day polling locations of **82** planned locations. In the General, we are committed to securing 84 to 86 in-person polling locations on Election Day.

In order to staff these locations, the county will hire 2 or 3 persons to handle training of poll workers, which are key to a smooth, in-person operation. The estimated cost of trainers is \$46,000. The estimated cost to pay election worker to attend 4 hour training classes is \$28,000.

Additionally, the county will buy disposable stylus for polling locations at a total cost of \$65,000.

	<u>Total cost</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Unit costs</u>
Poll Worker Hazard Pay	0		
Poll Worker PPE	\$4,200	600	\$7.00
Personnel Costs	\$28,000	1	\$28,000
Electronic Poll Books	\$45,000	30	\$1,500
Total	\$40,000		

Conclusion

The investments outlined above will allow Fort Bend County to reduce the risk of exposure to coronavirus for voters, election staff and poll workers; identify best practices; innovate to efficiently and effectively educate our residents about how to exercise their right to vote; be intentional and strategic in reaching our historically disenfranchised residents and communities; and, above all, ensure the right to vote in a diversity of communities throughout the county. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this request.