ELECTION FUNDING PROJECT
Support & Knowledge Partners

Funding:

James Irvine Foundation

Knowledge Partners:

California Voter Foundation
California Association of Clerks and Election Officials
California State Association of Counties
Urban Counties Caucus
Rural County Representatives of California
Funding was a local responsibility prior to SB 90 (1972)

Prop 13 (1978) restricted counties’ ability to generate revenue

Prop 1A (2004) suspended mandates become unfunded permissive statutes

Inability of counties to raise property tax revenue along with unfunded election mandates have led to tension between state and local governments.
Looking Beyond Mandates

- Original question: What are some alternative models that can more adequately, reliably and sustainably fund election administration in California?
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Work In Progress
State Survey

• **27** state election officials responded to survey.

• **70%** share funding responsibility between state and local governments.

• Significant variation among the states in the division of roles and funding responsibilities between state and local governments, and local governments and other jurisdictions.

• For exploratory purposes, the states can be grouped into three generalized categories: centralized, decentralized, and hybrid.
State Funding Groups

Group A: Centralized Election Administration Responsibility and Funding

- Uniform voting systems
- Responsibility is primarily at the state level
- Reimbursements from the state, or if state incurs costs up front, from the counties for some costs
  - New Mexico – The state funds voting systems, supplies and ballots. This is done in part by a ‘Voting System Revolving Fund.’
  - Georgia – The state funds the Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, which builds ballots and collects data. Voting systems were initially purchased by the state.
State Funding Groups

Group B: Decentralized Election Administration Responsibility and Funding

• Local governments select and purchase voting equipment
• Responsibility is primarily at the local level
• Reimbursements to county from local jurisdictions
• Seven of the responding states had models similar to CA with decentralized election administration, costs incurred by local governments and reimbursements sought from local jurisdictions.
• Counties use varying methodologies and formulas in charging other local jurisdictions for the cost of election services.
State Funding Groups

Group C: Shared Election Administration and Funding

• 70% of states share election responsibilities and funding between state and local governments, and among local governments.

• Entities are charged for their ‘fair share’ of election costs
  • Colorado – The state reimburses for even-year elections at $0.90 per actual voter in counties with less than 10,000 voters, and $0.80 per actual voter in counties with more than 10,000.
  • Louisiana – The state pays 75% of election costs; the remaining 25% are divided on a pro-rata share among local jurisdictions. The state pays the costs up front and locals reimburse.
  • Arizona – The state reimburses counties at a flat rate of $1.25 per registered voter.
  • Minnesota – Entities are charged by the amount of space they take on the ballot: (total costs) X (% of voters in jurisdiction) X (% of total column inches on ballot).
Issues That Transcend States:

Common Themes

• Entities should pay their ‘fair share’ of costs
• Determining the actual cost of election administration
• Lack of consistent data collection and reporting
• Lack of collaboration and cooperation
• Outdated election statutes and laws
• Need for legislative action

Potential Solutions

• Reliable funding
• Reducing budgetary restrictions
• Alternative funding mechanisms for voting systems
• Uniform voting systems
County Survey

- **33** county election officials responded to the election funding survey.

- **96%** agree or somewhat agree that California should adopt a different funding framework for elections.

- **88%** agree or somewhat agree that there should be collaboration among counties in providing election services and procuring voting equipment.

- **76%** indicated voting equipment needs to be replaced within 3-4 years, with 44% of those needing replacement within 1-2 years.

- **81%** are interested in exploring alternative funding methods for elections.

Do you agree with the statement: “California should adopt a different framework for state-county election funding”? 

![Pie chart showing responses to the statement]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>56.06%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
County Perspective: Challenges

• Inadequate funding for:
  • New laws and regulations
  • Complying with mandates
  • Purchasing voting systems
  • Special Elections

• Counties also indicated a need of funding for:
  • Staff
  • Administration
  • Education
  • Building space

• Most counties are waiting for the outcome of SB 450 before deciding how to move forward.

(photo credit: Carl Mikoy)
State Assistance

• Besides funding, counties said the state could help in other ways:

  • Streamline certification and approval processes
  
  • Update law/statute to accommodate new technology
  
  • Consult and collaborate with counties on new laws/regulations
  
  • Flexibility and timely regulation adoption
  
  • Authorize pilot projects
  
  • Expand the market of available products, systems and services
The Issues

• After assessing survey data and feedback along with conducting regional meetings with registrars, here are common themes:

• Technology is antiquated and hard to update – locking in higher costs

• The certification and procurement process limits the use of technology as a way to reduce and control costs

• Stalemate on “fair share” of election costs continues historic state-local tension, prevents improvements to the process

• Minimal cooperation among the counties to reduce costs

• Little incentive for continuous improvement and cost-savings at the local level
Defining a Solution

Creating a “Pathway to Modernization”

• Use technology to increase efficiency and efficacy
  • Update certification and procurement processes to accommodate new technology
  • Anticipate and incorporate technology options
  • Develop a funding mechanism with right incentives

• Improving the relationship between state and counties
  • Determining the “fair share” election costs
  • Option: State funding for special elections, statewide offices and ballot measures

• Create incentives for efficiency cooperation, and continuous improvement
Next Steps

• Explore ways technology can be useful, including updating certification and procurement.

• Structure state contribution to encourage the right results.

• Encourage counties to collaborate in continuous improvement efforts such as joint purchasing.
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