Considerations and Challenges for Clerk Training –
Excerpts from Oregon County Election Staffing Research Study:
Prepared for the Election Division of the
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Executive Summary

- **Training** present opportunities and challenges; our state needs to develop more systematic training as changes to elections occur.
- Oregon election offices are anticipating retirements, resignations, and loss of expertise.
- Staff recruitment, retention, and training are hampered by out-of-date job classifications, compensation, and perceptions of the work.
- Oregon Election officials and staff are subject to abuse, threats, and harassment.
What training opportunities does Oregon SOS offer?

- We provide virtual signature training as requested.
- We are building out a training program to accommodate new technologies.
- We host weekly calls and send weekly emails with resources.
- We are building out our online videos and resources.
- We work with state association on training modules during their twice yearly conferences.
Bottom line challenges:

- Our clerks want more training but struggle to make time.
- County elections staff come to trainings with highly diverse experience levels.
- Technology keeps changing and institutional knowledge turnover is constant.
- Recruitment for training position has been difficult.
- Getting trainers skilled up is time consuming and a big investment.
Training Challenge 1: Who is getting hired and what is their experience?

- Staff pay and compensation were reported as a frequent challenge for hiring and keeping election staff. Benefits are a positive
- Competition with other county departments to retain staff.
- Mismatch between the work in practice and content of job descriptions.
- Need for job analysis and compensation studies that fit the reality of elections.
Compensation and Classification

“...the position was generally classified as an administrative assistant. We were getting a lot of applicants who really were not appropriate for the job at all.”

“...a lot of the descriptions here are very clerical focused, like ballot focused, and I'm a voter focused elections administrator.”

“I've been waiting for years for this to change. And I'm not getting anywhere, and I'm going to lose employees.”
A second challenge is the election cycle itself: rarely a down period.

Generally, the peak of election activity starts with candidate filings, about 100 days prior to the election, and then tapers off 2-3 weeks after the election.
- Active election season is approximately 4 months long.

In even-numbered years, this means there are at least 8 months of intense election work.
Election Workload

“...with very rare exception, almost impossible for me to take a vacation. I’m constantly and maxed out on my time off, you know, near impossible for me to get away. I'm afraid to leave my office for more than a day or 2. I'll end up with a 1,000 emails. Because of my responsibilities. There almost is no downtime.”
Training Challenge 3: The Changing Nature of the Work

- New rules and new technology have made the work of elections far more complex.
- Elections are now year long processes – the peaks of activity are more and higher.
- For smaller counties, this presents a challenge when staff sizes may only be two people, and dedicating a position to elections is not an option.
Changing Nature of the Work

- “It's hard to keep up on the training, especially in elections, because things are changing so fast and so much with legislation and different things. It's hard.”

- “…there's other things we've been doing, too, because of all the misinformation. Now we have to be media social media experts, just things that have piled on on top.”
How This Impacts Training and Development

- Few Oregon offices have formalized training programs.
- Most use mentoring and on-the-job training to develop skills.
- With so many people to train, but also with so many fewer experienced hands, the pace of work inhibits training.
- Oregon Association of County Clerks can be a key resource, but barriers to use by all counties.
  - Cost
  - Travel Time
  - Staff Capacity
How This Impacts Training and Development

“Because, you know, it really takes 2-4 years before you really have seen elections. It's an event that happens very infrequently, but it takes a lot of preparation and learning, and I think we could, we could do tabletop exercises all day long, and it doesn't really, you know, prepare you for having a line [of voters] down the block.”