

ADMINISTERING THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

**Chronicling the Infrastructure Needs
of Local Election Officials**



A set of recommendations for infrastructure improvements based on a series of interviews with and stories collected from local election officials.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, local election officials have faced wide-reaching and fundamental changes to their work. Between frequently changing election laws and procedures,¹ the need to update and adopt new technology,² the rise of new security threats,³ and the heightened political awareness of their work,⁴ many veteran local election officials no longer recognize the job they originally took. These trends took on greater prominence in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, but they both predate the pandemic and show no signs of abating as the pandemic is taking a less central role in common life.

These changes are not all viewed as unwelcome by local election officials. In fact, many local election officials have embraced them as opportunities to modernize their offices and improve the voting experience. Yet it requires resources for local election officials to adapt their offices to survive in this new environment. While local election officials have been tasked with meeting these new challenges, the federal government has not meaningfully and consistently provided them with the tools they need to do so successfully. This is despite many of these new challenges being national in scope and origin.

The Election Infrastructure Initiative (EII) and its partner organizations have endeavored to shine a light on the challenges that local election officials are experiencing in this highly turbulent environment through conducting original research at the state⁵ and national⁶ level. This research has shown that election offices across the country are severely underfunded and struggling to meet the challenges of administering high quality elections in this new environment. Some offices are experiencing critical resource constraints, and lack even some of the basic infrastructure necessary to run elections in the 21st century. To fill these gaps, EII has estimated that the federal government would have to minimally invest \$20 billion in the nation's election infrastructure over the next ten years. Across the board, research by third party election experts,⁷ peer stakeholders,⁸ and federal agencies⁹ have come to similar estimates and confirmed the extent of the need. And recent polling¹⁰ has shown that broad bipartisan majorities of Americans support funding local election offices at the level that EII and others have identified as necessary.

In this report, EII hopes to build on this prior work and uplift the voices of local election officials from across the country and from every political persuasion to demonstrate where local election officials are experiencing the greatest resource constraints in this election cycle. The quotes and recommendations in this report come from a series of interviews with and stories collected directly from local election officials. While many election officials are experiencing acute and onerous budget constraints and challenges this year, they are working diligently and finding creative workarounds to fulfill their obligation of administering the election. Despite their ingenuity and perseverance, local election officials emphasized that a significant and reliable outlay of additional resources will be necessary to ensure the integrity of future elections and that voters cannot simply rely on their dogged resourcefulness to save the day year after year.



- *Tiana*

Tiana Epps-Johnson
Founder & Executive Director

¹ Brennan Center for Justice, "Voting Laws Roundup: December 2021," December 21, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-december-2021>; National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Elections Legislation Database," accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/elections-legislation-database.aspx>.

² Pam Fessler, "States Upgrade Election Equipment — Wary Of 'A Race Without A Finish Line," NPR, September 3, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/03/756007555/states-upgrade-election-equipment-wary-of-a-race-without-a-finish-line>.

³ Neil Vigdor, "Cameras, Plexiglass, Fireproofing: Election Officials Beef Up Security," The New York Times, September 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/06/us/politics/midterms-elections-threats-security.html>.

⁴ Quinn Yeargain, "The People Who Count Our Elections—or Can Grind the Process to a Halt," Bolts, July 21, 2022, <https://boltsmag.org/the-people-who-count-our-elections/>.

⁵ Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Proposal 3 Implementation: Supporting Michigan Clerks," July 2019; Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Preparing to Implement Potential Election Reforms: Supporting Michigan Clerks," August 2022.

⁶ Election Infrastructure Initiative, "50 States of Need," accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.modernizeourelections.org/50statesofneed>.

⁷ Charles Stewart III, "The Cost of Conducting Elections," CommonSense American and MIT Election Data + Science Lab, accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.commonsenseamerican.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/TheCostofConductingElections-2022.pdf>; Mohr et al., "Election Administration Spending in Local Election Jurisdictions: Results from a

Nationwide Data Collection Project" (paper submitted for the Election Sciences, Reform, and Administration (ESRA) conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison, July 26-27, 2018), <https://esra.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1556/2020/11/mohr.pdf>; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Securing the Vote: Protecting American Democracy* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2018), 153.

⁸ Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. "What does Election Security Cost?" August, 15, 2019, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/what-does-election-security-cost>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *Election Infrastructure Subsector-Specific Plan*, 10, accessed October 1, 2022, https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/election_infrastructure_subsector_specific_plan.pdf.

¹⁰ Data for Progress conducted a survey of 2,972 likely voters, March 4-8, 2022; Robert Blizzard of Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national survey 1,020 registered voters (credibility interval of ± 3.50) and 618 Republican primary voters (credibility interval of ± 4.49) who were interviewed via a representative online sample, April 8-15, 2022.

Summary of needs and recommendations

The common thread that emerged in conversations with local election officials from across the country is that they are desperately in need of **consistent, reliable, equitable, and robust funding** to continue to successfully administer elections in light of new challenges and rising costs.

In order to meaningfully address the needs of local election officials, this funding must continue to increase year-over-year. Minimally, EII estimates that **the total minimum federal investment over the next ten years will have to amount to \$20 billion.**

Election officials across the country are facing common challenges, but they have diverse funding needs. In fact, nearly every election office is starting at different budget points and operating in different resource environments; and some, though plainly not all, local election offices are well-funded at the state or local level. An election office in a rural community with poor broadband access and whose voters are spread out across a wide geography will not have the same needs as an office in an urban community that has experienced generations of divestment, and that office will not have the same needs as an office with a voter population for whom a majority are non-native English speakers. Given this reality, **local election officials need funding grants that give them the discretion to decide precisely how to spend them across a variety of permissible priorities.**

In their testimonials, local election officials described current and past federal funding as difficult to utilize due to the irregularity in which the funding has been appropriated, the inaccessible bureaucracy that local officials have had to navigate to receive the funding, the extra obstacles that have been introduced when state officials are charged with overseeing the disbursement of funding to local offices, and the sometimes onerous reporting requirements that accompany the grants which occupy increasing amounts of staff time in local offices. To counter this trend, future **federal funding should be made accessible directly and expeditiously to local election officials with fewer constraints and conditions.**

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**“ELECTIONS ARE ALWAYS THE UGLY
STEP SISTER THAT THE COUNTY ONLY
RELUCTANTLY FUNDS. WE’RE NEVER
HIGH ON THE PRIORITY LIST.”**

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM CALIFORNIA

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Safety and security

Increasingly, local election officials are facing threats to their safety and the security of their facilities. Yet, many local election officials lack the resources to adequately protect themselves. And many local election officials have struggled to access the limited federal security grant opportunities that have recently been expanded to cover election infrastructure.

"Our physical security is not good enough. The office used to be a retail store so it's wide open and anyone can just walk all the way up from the front door to my office or the server room. There are no additional locked doors stopping them. We will start working on enclosing the lobby next year. [Ten years ago] this wasn't an issue but now it is. We had to put in cameras for the first time this year too." - A local election official from California

"We have had to close the doors [of our office] to the public since 2020, otherwise there are no metal detectors and security." - A local election official from Pennsylvania

"Since 2020 we have seen a dramatic uptick in aggressive interactions at the poll sites between voters and election staff...[V]oters are suspicious of what they are doing when they vote (a process that has not changed) and some of them violently lash out at election inspectors at the poll sites with language and threats of violence. There is no mechanism in place to address these problems with voters outside of utilizing law enforcement which is not an ideal solution for civic engagement. We do our best to de-escalate situations but it has led to good, long-term inspectors quitting because they don't want to interact with a voter population that treats them with disrespect and in some cases threatens them with violence." - A local election official from New York

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to make capital improvements to harden and increase the security of their facilities. This funding will complement existing partnerships and synergies that have been formed across all units of government that are helping to identify, monitor, and defuse security threats.
- Local election officials should also be empowered to use this funding to make temporary or permanent improvements to their polling locations in order to make them more secure.
- Local election officials should further be empowered to use this funding to increase safety training for permanent and temporary frontline staff and employ other creative strategies to keep their staff safe as they see fit.

“ADEQUATE FUNDING IS THE FOUNDATION FOR A ROBUST ELECTION ADMINISTRATION. IN RECENT YEARS THE ELECTION PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS PUT ON THE BACK OF LOCAL OFFICIALS HAS COMPLETELY CHANGED ELECTION ADMINISTRATION IN SO MANY AREAS.

HAVING THE FUNDING TO FULLY STAFF OUR OFFICE, TO INCREASE PHYSICAL AND CYBER SECURITY, TO [PROVIDE] VOTER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH, TO [UPGRADE OUR] EQUIPMENT TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS. ALL OF THESE AREAS EQUATE TO THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS.”

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM VIRGINIA

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Morale, mistreatment, and harassment

Alongside the recent rise of election denialism and an associated antidemocratic movement, local election officials are experiencing targeted harassment, abuse, and mistreatment by members of their own communities. This has taken a huge toll on the morale of nearly every office. It has also contributed to the wave of local election officials who have decided to leave the profession altogether.¹¹ Local election officials who contributed to this report emphasized the gravity of this phenomenon, and shared their frustration with the lack of resources they have to counter this abuse.

"This job is not the same job I took [20], let alone 5 years ago. The exodus we're seeing is [going to] come down to people who can shift to a much more high profile and public facing type of job. We used to be diligent and hard workers who kept our heads down [but] now there is no grace and no understanding of human error." - A local election official from California

"What we suffered through in November [2020] was a heartbreaker for me because [our staff] should have been celebrated for what they did, what they pulled off, but instead they received the opposite." - A local election official from Nevada

"Over the last couple months as the retention deadline has rolled around for the 2020 election, we've received a ton of public record requests. In 2021 we received 22 requests over the course of the whole year, and we only received three requests in 2020; now we've already received over 30 requests [and the year is not yet up]...The workload is increasing." - A local election official from California

"I [have to] work three jobs in an attempt to afford working as a public servant. I have a degree in this field and still make less than fast food workers. After four years of this, a presidential election during a pandemic that we still get FOIAs for that was settled two years ago, I am tired. I adore what I do but this is absurd. Election officials, especially in smaller localities, are treated so poorly that I have no idea how we will ever convince a new generation to get into this field. I literally just want to be a cheerleader for democracy, I want everyone eligible to vote, but taking the vow of poverty should not be part of the deal." - A local election official from Virginia

¹¹ Michael Wines, "After a Nightmare Year, Election Officials Are Quitting," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/02/us/politics/2020-election-voting-officials.html>.

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to increase benefits for all permanent and temporary staff as they see fit, including generous paid time off around election seasons, and to increase compensation across the board for all permanent and temporary staff.
- Congress should further appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to hire new staff or dedicate existing staff time to respond to public record requests and litigation.
- Congress should also appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to publicly recognize the good work of their staff and overcome baseless allegations of impropriety.
- Leaders from all units of government, media companies, and influencers should continue to work to amplify truthful and accurate information; report, remove, and undercut misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) and public threats against election officials; and celebrate election heroes.

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“WE GET ONE-TIME FUNDING...BUT WE DON’T KNOW HOW MUCH WE’RE GETTING YEAR OVER YEAR. WE ALWAYS HAVE THINGS WE CAN BUY ONE TIME, BUT THEN WE HAVE A LOT OF ONGOING NEEDS...WE CAN’T DO MUCH MORE TO HIRE PEOPLE WITHOUT ADDITIONAL ONGOING FUNDING...”

[SOMETIMES] WE HAVE LEFTOVER [FEDERAL] FUNDS BECAUSE FUNDING IS SO INCONSISTENT SO WE HAVE TO BE MORE PRUDENT WITH IT. WE TREAT IT LIKE A SAVINGS ACCOUNT OR A RAINY-DAY FUND. IT’S MORE OF A SYMPTOM OF HOW INCONSISTENT OUR FUNDING IS AND HOW HARD IT IS TO GET RAINY DAY DOLLARS.”

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM PENNSYLVANIA

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People power

Local election officials have struggled to recruit and retain both permanent and temporary staff because they lack enough funding to properly compensate them. Many of them have lost long-time and reliable staff due to this issue – taking with them irreplaceable institutional knowledge. And those critical staff members, who stay out of a sincere belief in the importance of the work, struggle to make ends meet.

"I just lost my voter registration manager. His background was in GIS [geographic information systems]. When I hired him, I knew my job was to develop him professionally and he would eventually move on to a new position that was more advanced or more in line with his education...He absolutely loved our office culture though and didn't want to leave. But the main reason [he left] was the pay. That is our biggest weakness. The county is unwilling to properly pay folks. The work we do is uniquely specialized – it involves some general work but they need to know state-specific processes and requirements. That requires specialized knowledge or experience and the county doesn't see it that way. They see them as just generalists...I've tried to offset that with culture and provide them with other benefits...We already lost our trainer too so we're now down two critical positions, just [a couple] months from the election...One year I didn't accept my merit increase and gave it to my staff instead but I can't do that every year." - A local election official from North Carolina

"We need five times the staff that we used to. We're competing with McDonalds and Starbucks on wages in order to give folks a competitive wage [and often falling short]." - A local election official from Nevada

"We had more no-call-no-shows among poll workers than ever. We had 40 people, about one per polling location, who just didn't show [up]." - A local election official from California

"With the market where it is [our staff] haven't been getting as much money and they make pretty much just what they did in the 1990s give or take. These used to be family-sustaining jobs but now they're just above the poverty level and it's more difficult to attract the type of candidates that you would like to have in those roles. We're not as competitive with salaries as we used to be. It's also a problem for retention." - A local election official from Pennsylvania

"[My county doesn't] want to provide funding for long-term employees. Over the past two years I have fought to get staffing but we're still lower than other comparable counties...It's a challenge to bring in good poll workers...[T]here's a

skill gap for the retirees that want to assist. And people like college students who have the skills to use our equipment don't want to sign up because we don't pay enough and it's not a long-term job. They don't want to come for a couple weeks and then go back to having no job again." - A local election official from Utah

I was doing a lot of things to increase staff; it's hard when you're in an economic downturn. We were always tightening our belt and we were often left at the county's mercy. We can make a case as best we can that we have a statutorily required program and need additional staffing; that works sometimes but they always scrutinize the number of people we ask for." - A local election official from California

"In the past we have had budget shortfalls in payroll, due to staff overtime and having to pay for poll workers to work expanded [early voting] hours. As a result, we had to go before [our county's leadership] to ask for the additional funding."

- A local election official from Georgia

"[If we had additional funding,] we would finally have the staff needed to not force our short-staffed offices to work through nights, weekends, and multiple holidays." - A local election official from Virginia

"It's all about funding and staffing levels. Election workers are no longer doing what they did a decade ago. The job has grown exponentially and the pay has remained very low, particularly when you consider the long hours, level of responsibility, threats against election workers, changing laws and increased workload. Sometimes the yearly increase in contracts does not even account for the cost-of-living increase, meaning these very workers are making less than they did the year before when you consider a challenging economic year."

- A local election official from New Jersey

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to increase compensation and benefits across the board for their permanent and temporary staff.
- Local election officials should be empowered to use this funding to support additional creative recruitment and retention strategies as they see fit.

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“I AM A NEW [ELECTION OFFICIAL AND] I PAID OUT OF POCKET [FOR MANY OFFICE EXPENSES].”

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM VIRGINIA

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Equipment and supplies

Many local election officials are relying on aging voting machines and associated equipment, and they lack the resources to either maintain or ultimately replace them with higher quality, longer lasting, and modern equipment.

[The tabulators we use were originally designed using 1990s technology. Our batch was purchased around 2007]. So we have had to be concerned about the capacity of the machines; we have had to hand feed ballots into them one at a time [when they are used to tabulate mail ballots], and we needed to set up banks of them with plans for downtime or failure...A concern for us is finding replacement parts. For example, we had over 100 tabulators melt in the primary when it got extremely hot. It's difficult to get parts to repair them due to their age. We may have to cannibalize used parts from states that used to use the same machines but have already decommissioned them...The state is waiting for federal money [to replace the tabulators].” - A local election official from Connecticut

“There is a lifecycle for the equipment that you’re purchasing – the lifecycle of electronic equipment is a lot shorter than the old mechanical equipment that you used to use. Punches for punch card ballots could last 30-50 years long and lever machines were used for many many years, but after five years your voting equipment’s operating system may be no longer supported and something that we really need to stay on top of, looking at the validity of the system and the operating environment where it’s located. In an optimal world, it’s a five-to-seven-year life cycle. And that’s at best two presidential elections. That’s amazing when you think about it that way. It will only span eight years. We [have to change] equipment out that frequently.” - A local election official from California

*“Our electronic poll books are iPads. When Apple decides to stop supporting aging devices we will be in a bad situation. If we could rely on consistent funding, we could spread the cost out over years and not have shocks to the budget.”
- A local election official from Ohio*

“Our greatest funding challenge is large capital purchases of hardware and/or software. Most large purchases can be anticipated, but there isn’t a great way to save for these purchases.” - A local election official from Missouri

These challenges extend to even basic supplies as well, such as paper for ballots and forms.

"The finalization of our ballots was delayed due to political infighting. It's a challenge to get them ordered and printed in time to meet our deadline for mailing out absentee ballots as a result." - A local election official from Michigan

"[It's challenging when we have] to re-order forms because there were changes to the existing ones." - A local election official from Texas

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to acquire updated voting machines and equipment, in coordination with their state and local partners.
- Local election officials should also be empowered to save this funding for future maintenance and supply order needs so they can adequately absorb and plan for these expenses.

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**IF WE KNEW THERE WAS GOING TO BE
CONSISTENT FUNDING, WE WOULD BE
ABLE TO BETTER CONTROL ONGOING
COSTS AND PLAN FOR CAPITAL
EXPENSES. NOW WE JUST WAIT FOR
THE STATE TO GET AROUND TO
FUNDING PROJECTS AFTER THEY ARE
NEEDED.”**

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM OHIO

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Physical infrastructure

Local election officials who contributed to this report have been experiencing acute challenges with their physical infrastructure. In particular, many of them are experiencing growing pains in their own offices and struggling to provide adequate accommodations to their staff and voters alike.

"[S]pace is a significant [concern]. More warehouse and office space to add employees would help. I have nowhere to even put a new full-time employee!"

- A local election official from North Carolina

"[T]he challenge is [our] facilities – [they] have been designed for in-person voting and storage, not for processing mail ballots. Now with a lot of help...we've been able to figure out a layout that has us hop-scotch all over our facility for mail ballot processing. It becomes a challenge for workers and observers though. We have all of these cubicles that get really hot. We need sheetrock walls to make this permanent. We need future capital funding...for this." - A local election official from Nevada

"Our office space is not at all adequate. It's fine for voters, but for us internally it's not sufficient. Our training room for instance – we have to start training so early because we can only fit 14 people in there at a time and we need to train 300 poll workers total. So we have to have so many [training sessions]." - A local election official from North Carolina

"[Our ballot processing center has] [t]wo single-stalled restrooms, in a space that can have upwards of 70 employees." - A local election official from Washington

Local election officials are also experiencing challenges with acquiring sufficient storage space to accommodate new equipment and supplies. Some of the workarounds they have been stuck with are unsafe for staff and unsustainable in the long-term.

"Our workspace for preparing our supplies that the polling places need is also tight. The supply cages containing our equipment are packed to the gills. Trying to move them is like playing Tetris." - A local election official from North Carolina

"We [submitted a request to our local legislative body] to use ARPA funding [to build out a new ballot processing and storage facility] and due to political infighting [they] denied it. So we have scraped out of everywhere else in the budget to make it happen. They let us into the building but denied funding to actually fix it. We went barebones but it still cost over \$50,000. We needed to put

"in restrooms and running water. We still don't even have AC." - A local election official from Utah

"[We have] an old warehouse that needs a lot of improvement with technology...It's not climate controlled and it's more susceptible to the elements. We have to be cognizant if it's a really hot day that people don't pass out."
- A local election official from California

These challenges with obtaining adequate facilities for office space and storage extend to polling locations as well, where voters experience these constraints most intensely.

"We have a lot of older buildings. Our challenge is to find buildings that are wheelchair accessible [to use as polling locations]." - A local election official from Pennsylvania

"We used to have many schools as polling locations but now there are almost none...And they pull out because they have to pay janitors extra to come in early to let us in and stay late to clean afterward. If we could cover that overtime; just a few hundred dollars would make a difference. Some schools are interested [in offering their facilities] but then they have to pull out due to the overtime cost."
- A local election official from California

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to make capital improvements to their facilities and acquire new facilities for office and storage space as necessary, including temporary solutions while capital improvements are underway.
- Local election officials should also be empowered to use this funding to make temporary or permanent improvements to their polling locations in order to make them more accessible to all voters.

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**“WE’RE OFTEN ROBBING PETER
TO PAY PAUL.”**

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM CALIFORNIA

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Technology

Voters expect and deserve to be provided with a 21st-century voting experience. But local election officials are struggling to afford the technology solutions that would allow them to provide voters with the higher quality, more accessible, efficient, and transparent voting experience of the 21st century.

"When we send [mail] ballots to voters we would love to have intelligent barcodes on them so they can be tracked. Right now, we can only track ballots when we mail them out and receive them back. But with the barcodes, the voter could track them in transit in the postal system, and then also get text alerts and proactive messages on the status of their ballot." - A local election official from Connecticut

"[Additional] funds would help me get ... a task management or project management software. That would allow me to track deliverables and deadlines without micro-managing my staff." - A local election official from North Carolina

"My goal is to set up processes, policies, and procedures for the long-term. Not nickel and diming them. If [we're only provided with] what we need in the moment then we're hurting in the long-term by not [being able to purchase] equipment that makes [our operations] more efficient and allows us to report out [results] faster. We have decent equipment but not the best. We make do with [what we have] but if we got [equipment like an automatic ballot sorter] which costs \$250,000 we wouldn't have to staff up as much for sorting and processing mail ballots, for example." - A local election official from Utah

"[We need] reliable, secure Wi-Fi for rural polling locations... [With additional funding] we would be able to purchase secure hotspots." - A local election official from Kansas

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to purchase and implement technology solutions that improve office efficiencies, election integrity, and the voting experience.
- Local election officials should also be empowered to use this funding to train their permanent and temporary staff on how to use and maintain these technology solutions.

“IN ILLINOIS, THE STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS WAS ALLOCATED SOME MONEY THROUGH THE CARES ACT THAT WENT TO ELECTION AUTHORITIES - WE USED IT TO SET UP A FUND THAT COVERED POSTAGE FOR MAIL BALLOTS TO AND FROM VOTERS. WE [WERE ALSO ABLE TO] USE CARES ACT FUNDS TO PURCHASE A MAIL BALLOT SORTER AND [SEND A MAILER] TO VOTERS [NOTIFYING THEM OF THEIR OPTIONS] TO VOTE BY MAIL. THIS YEAR THERE IS NOT THAT MONEY.”

- A LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIAL FROM ILLINOIS

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Outreach and communications

In light of the widespread rise of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM) related to election administration, local election officials find themselves newly tasked with the responsibility to dispel the falsehoods and conspiracy theories that their voters fall victim to when they are exposed to MDM. Yet, they lack the resources to both balance this new responsibility against their existing responsibilities and effectively amplify their truthful counter messaging.

“Voter education and outreach doesn't come with funding – it's the first thing that [gets cut] and it's always a battle to get any funding for it.” - A local election official from California

“We don't have a full-time staff [who can spend] days going to every school in the district [to recruit poll workers] saying please help. You really need an outreach and communications person. [The person in our office who otherwise helps with outreach] runs the [mail ballot sorting] machines and stuff. We need more bodies to do things.” - A local election official from Illinois

“Going into 2024, something that we'll have to think about is outreach on social media and our website. Currently, I do all of that for the office. When there's something more urgent going on that falls to the wayside. Getting someone that is [qualified and tasked with doing] something like that [would help]. [We're] thinking about reaching younger people or more rural areas that aren't digitally engaged – how do I get to those folks? Having a person to serve that role would be incredible.” - A local election official from North Carolina

“[We need] a marketing campaign to regain the confidence of our voters. There's a small group that is consistently beating us down, accusing us of doing things that are simply untrue. We're opening up [our facilities] for observation for virtually any part of the election process. The problem we run into is that they want to do things that are not allowed by law – like sitting behind election workers and disagreeing with how or what the worker was doing. There are people who are working to simply discredit election workers through misinformation. We'd like funding for a marketing campaign...that would allow us to set up an open house, have direct contact with local groups, do a demonstration of a mock election process, and let folks witness it all. We haven't had time to do that; we're working hard to just make sure our foundation is strong and implementing the new systems that we're bringing in.” - A local election official from Nevada

"[W]e're dealing with people consuming misinformation online and then calling us about it. This is spreading like cancer here in our small and rural community."
- A local election official from California

"The difficulty is in the constant barrage of negativity from the public...I'm an elected Republican and this is me saying good lord, stop! We don't have a budget for communications...for now, I put like \$4,000-\$5,000 into radio ads a couple weeks before Election Day. But never outside of that. So we try to push back [on the MDM]... If we could push back more, then that would help. I don't blame [voters] for being concerned but we can't do our job effectively when we're trying to run the election, fight disinformation, and beg for resources at the same time. For election officials unfortunately nothing comes easy." - *A local election official from Utah*

Recommendations:

- Congress should appropriate a predictable and ongoing series of grants of funding to local election officials that they can use to hire new staff or dedicate existing staff time to oversee voter outreach and communications.
- Local election officials should also be empowered to use this funding to pay for creative communication strategies as they see fit, including advertisements, mailers, and community events.

Next steps

Altogether, local election officials from all over the country are struggling to cover standard expenses across a range of budget needs in light of rising costs and new challenges. These include fixed and ongoing funding needs for their security, office morale, staffing, equipment and supplies, facilities, technology, and communications capabilities. Absent an additional and reliable stream of funding, local election officials are digging through the bottom of their pockets and employing creative yet vulnerable strategies to continue to successfully administer elections. But they know that this is unsustainable on any reasonable timeframe.

The extent of the need is greater than any one locality or state can fully shoulder. The federal government must rise to the occasion, pay for their fair share of the local election systems that they continually rely on, and invest in protecting the integrity of the nation's election infrastructure. Local election officials need consistent, reliable, equitable, and robust federal funding to meet these unmet and growing funding needs.

There are many ways that the federal government can go about fulfilling their obligation. Local election officials who contributed to this report proposed a number of creative funding solutions that the federal government can employ to make them whole. Some of these solutions draw from lessons learned and feedback that has been shared based on prior federal funding interventions. Election officials appreciate the federal government's proud legacy of investing in local election infrastructure, and have greatly relied on past grants of funding. In order to ensure that future federal funding can be used efficiently and make the strongest impact, such funding should be delivered directly to local election officials and they should be empowered with as much discretion in the application of such funding as possible.

Local election officials need Congress to rise to the occasion and urgently appropriate significant funds to election infrastructure, including physical and cyber security. Congress should heed the calls for help from local election officials who are in dire need across the country and invest in the nation's election infrastructure.

About the report

Throughout the month of September, 2022 the Election Infrastructure Initiative interviewed local election officials from across the country. The election officials interviewed represent a diverse cross section of election administration experiences and perspectives, regions, sizes of jurisdictions, and political affiliations. In total, the election officials interviewed serve nearly four million registered voters.

The local election officials interviewed were asked questions from a standard list of questions related to their resource and funding needs, as time permitted. The length of each interview was approximately 30 minutes.

In addition to these interviews, EII collected responses from local election officials to a survey related to their resource and funding needs. EII invited local election officials from across the country to complete the survey through individual email outreach, promotion in e-newsletters, postcards, and a digital ad campaign. Election officials who submitted responses to the survey collectively serve over two million registered voters.

In total, EII collected input through interviews and survey responses from election officials representing a total of 36 unique jurisdictions.

About the Election Infrastructure Initiative

The [Election Infrastructure Initiative](#) is a collaborative effort, bringing together election officials, nonprofits, counties, cities, and states who believe that election infrastructure is some of our nation's most critical and should be funded appropriately. Our goal is to secure robust and reliable federal funding to support local elections offices in running secure, modern, and accessible elections in every jurisdiction in the country.